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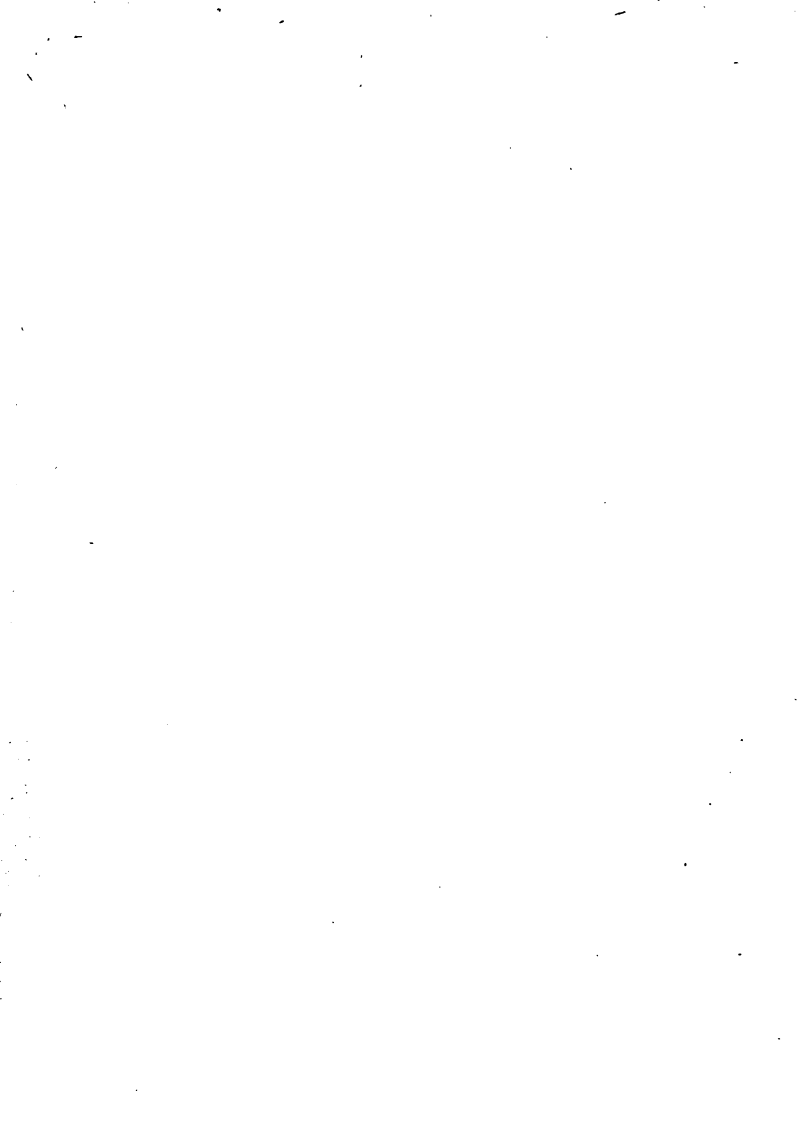
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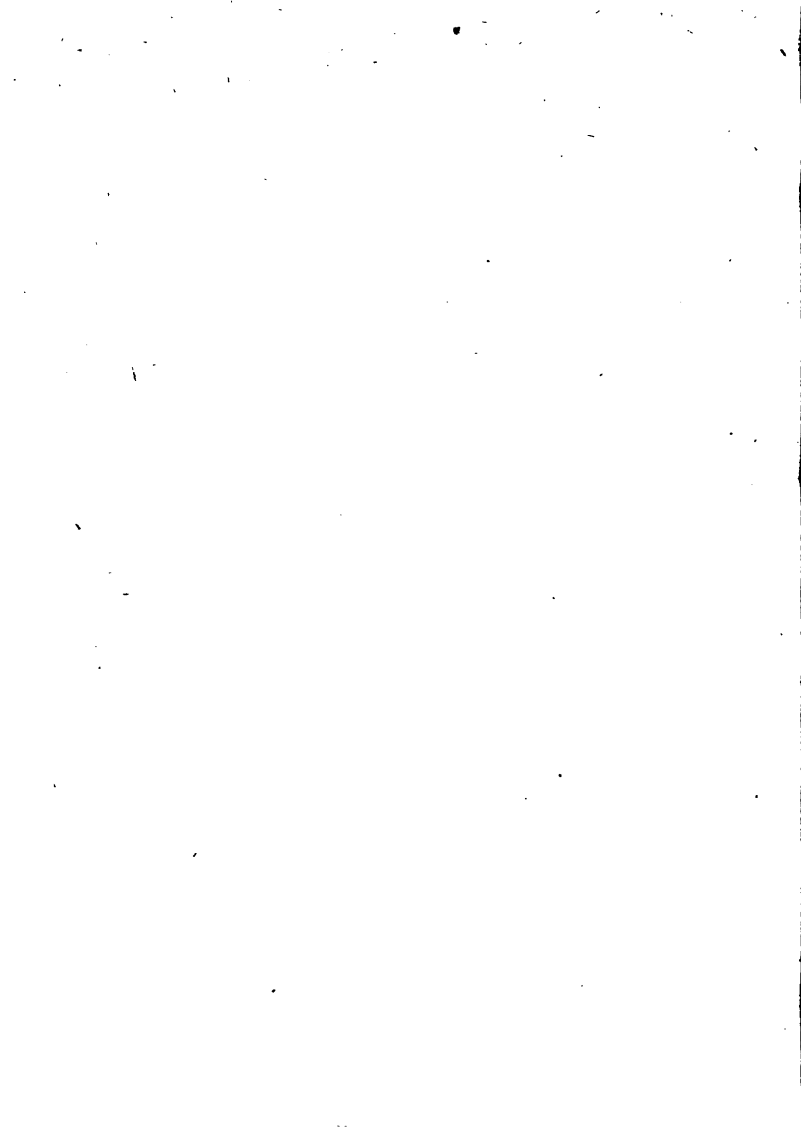












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IN THE OLDEN TIME
BY THE AUTHOR OF "MADEMOISELLE MORI."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I

LEIPZIG

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PREFACE.

THE PERIOD of the Peasant War of 1524-5 in Germany is one of such unrelieved gloom, that it would not lend itself to the purposes of fiction were it not that even then domestic life went on, endangered indeed, and greatly agitated, but persistent. It is the effect of this wild and troubled time on the fortunes of private individuals, rather than its historical side, which is presented in the following tale.

One historical character, however, appears in it, drawn in a more favourable light than that in which he is usually shown. Ulrich of Würtemberg has had the misfortune to be chiefly known to posterity through the writings of implacable enemies, who, while observing to the full the precept of "Nothing extenuate," have set down a great deal in malice. Historians have accepted their statements only too readily, and only one here and there has noted that the later life of Duke Ulrich redeemed the offences

of earlier years, and amply showed that he had learned the uses of adversity.

Readers of old German chronicles will recognise the outline of the leper's story—the "poor clerk who sat desolate, while all Germany sang his songs."

It should perhaps be added that the name of "Rosilde" was hereditary in one or two ancient families, and seems early to have been accepted as meaning a rose, though derived from quite another source.

IN THE OLDEN TIME.

CHAPTER I.

THERE have been times in every country where the art of preaching is practised when it has sunk to so low an ebb as to have lost all influence and to have fallen into derision, times when the people lent a weary and scornful ear to preachers with no message to give. Never, perhaps, was this more strikingly the case than in Germany at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The great religious movement of two hundred years earlier had died away, or was crushed by Rome; the pulpit had become merely a means of recommending abuses encouraged by the Church, or a place where the listeners were entertained by coarse jests and stories. When Easter came with its unmannerly revels, the priest of such a country village as that in the Ilzthal would interrupt his discourse to cry cuckoo, or cackle like a hen, or tell a legend of how St. Peter,

drinking at a tavern, had by a merry trick cheated mine host of his score, and the church, tolerably well filled for once in the year, would resound with laughter and applause. For some forty years the Ilzthalers had had no better shepherd than this Pfarrer Cyprian, and it was small wonder if Luther could assert of peasants under such pastors that they "lived like the dear cattle and unreasoning swine, came not once to church in five Sundays, nor to the Lord's Table in five years." Spiritual life had died out, and only terrified and timid superstition remained. If any preacher dared speak home truths, he might expect to be fallen upon and beaten as soon as he left the church. Pfarrer Cyprian knew this, and never made the experiment.

But there were signs of a mighty reviving breath blowing over Germany; a prophet and teacher had arisen, and here and there throughout the land one and another, though often opposed to his special doctrines, was roused to speak stirring words, and though such voices were apt to be silenced, or sent by ecclesiastical authority to out-of-the-way places, yet even in a desert a preacher who can speak to men's hearts will find an audience gather; and such an one, it was rumoured, had come to the Ilzthal to replace Pfarrer Cyprian, now laid in the grave-

yard around the Church of St. Eustatius—a little space, enclosed by a low thick edge of fir-trees, clipped as close as a box edging, with here and there a single tree standing up, its lower boughs trimmed away, exactly like the trees in a Noah's ark, which indeed were doubtless copied from such a model. Many a Noah's ark, with other toys and pine-wood furniture, were sent from the Ilzthal and the neighbouring valleys to Eisenach and Erfurt, for the villagers in this district rivalled even Nuremberg in their handiwork, and though transport from such secluded spots was difficult, on the top of the wooded hills ran the Rennsteig, a good highway along which traffic could pass.

The Ilzthal was a narrow valley in the great Thuringian forest, and in the upper part hardly more than a wild ravine, and the village at its mouth stood rather where it could than where it would, all the houses being crowded on a spot of ground round one end of which the wild mountain stream, which rushed down from the high land beyond, made a sudden turn, converting it into a miniature peninsula. Almost every house had a stone passage built under it to allow the water, when in flood, time and space to escape, instead of hurling its weight against the walls. They were irregular one-storied houses, with high steep roofs,

covered with brown tiles, or else slated like the little steeple of the church; and a few, belonging not to serfs but free peasants, were cased all over with a kind of slate-armour, like a knight in his mail. But most of them were very humble, with rough stone steps, and small windows letting in little air or light, and more than one was so decrepit that it was only kept upright by strong wooden supports, which sustained the projecting upper storey, and were driven deep into the bed of the stream, in spite of the risk that a rush of water would one day sweep them away.

The fronts of the houses all looked across the stream towards the great mass of rock towering above the church, and known as the Burgstein, whose giant cliffs, scarred and rent by time and tempest, seemed ever threatening to fall and crush the church below, and yet stood on, and stand there still, just as they did that autumn evening in 1524 when the new priest of Ilzthal was preaching to his flock.

The church was strangely niched under the rocks, probably to be out of the way of the stream when it swelled in flood, and the architecture was perforce adapted to the situation. Two narrow aisles enclosed a wide nave, with pillars rising to support a roof whose lofty height was out of all

proportion to the diminutive little steeple. The building was evidently the offering of a piety or a remorse which had sought to spend on it all which could be spent. The carved work came from the hand of artificers from Ulm; the windows glowed with gorgeous painted glass, and around the capitals of the pillars were carved roses, bud and blossom, leaf and fruit, the badges of the lord of Burgstein, who dwelt in the castle which crowned the rocks overhead, and whose ancestors had built the church and dedicated it to their patron saint.

Never in the memory of anyone in the valley had such a congregation been seen within its walls as was gathered there that autumn evening, and, instead of whispering, interrupting the sermon by audible remarks, or beguiling the time with deep draughts from the beer-cans which they brought with them and set under their seats, the listeners grew more and more wrapt in absorbed attention.

They were all peasants, but by no means all Ilzthalers; the fame of the preacher must have travelled far, for among his hearers were some from distant valleys—charcoal-burners and miners, serfs from other estates, and a sprinkling of free Bauers, owning their own land, but hardly better off than serfs.

The soft dusky twilight had hardly yet gathered

outside of the building. There was a pink glow in the western sky passing into saffron; a bright gleam yet lingered on the highest trees at the farther end of the little valley, and on the cross of stone roses upon the roof of the church, and in the scattered silvery spray of the Pöllatwasser, as it leaped out of a cavern far overhead, and showered down into the stream flowing below. But within the building it had grown so dark that the faces of the congregation were dim and indistinct. Standing, as he did, above them, the countenance of the preacher was however visible in a shaft of light which fell from a window of clear glass, high up, and illumined the pale features. So wrapped were his auditors in his discourse that none could have told if he had spoken a long time or a short one, but now he was near the end of his sermon. He leant slightly forward, with an intense pleading earnestness.

"You dread Hell, dear brothers," he was saying, "and you are right. But understand this, all of you, it is not through pilgrimage, or offering, or indulgence, that you will escape it. Hell is the absence of God. As far as He is absent, any condition is like hell, only here we are so taken up with what we behold, and handle, that only now and then do we know this. When we die, those things are gone, and we must face the want of Him.

But, say you, we fear God as much as we do hell. How shall we stand before Him? How shall we see Him? Ah, friends, you *cannot* see Him, for without holiness no man shall see His face here or hereafter. No, we dare not look on Him, even if we could. But——” and the mellow, musical voice took an indescribable tone of rapturous, tender triumph, “there is One on whom we may look, and see God and yet live—our dear Lord. Our dear Lord!” he repeated, looking upward, and standing for an instant with raised hands, and such a gaze of wrapt devotion and glad certainty, that perhaps not one heart there but was thrilled for an instant at least with the perception of that mysterious, unique attraction of the Cross which is the secret spell of Christianity. There was a moment of perfect stillness; then the look of one communing with an unseen world faded from the preacher’s face; he sighed, looked down for an instant on the congregation, already shaking off the spell which he had cast upon them, and gave the blessing. They rose as if in haste to escape from the strange new feeling which he had awakened, and flocked out of the church. Most of the women hastened homeward with their children, but many of the men lingered to discuss what they had heard, and him who had spoken. There was a hush as they saw

him leave the church by a side door, and turn towards his small, isolated house, close by—a man of middle stature, with finely cut pale features, dark eyes, and a sensitive beautiful mouth. It was the face of a man who could not go through life without suffering keenly; who would feel as anguish what a coarser or stronger nature would hardly count pain at all. A man with that look would be sure to shrink all his life long with morbid horror from anything base, or coarse, or painful, even while forcing himself pitilessly to encounter it. He looked singularly out of place among his rustic flock.

Everyone looked after him with interest, or, at all events, a dull curiosity. “A good man!” one bystander murmured, with a wistful sigh, as if feelings long dormant had been stirred.

“A good man, say you? I know not as to that, but a heretic he is, mark my words,” put in an old woman, leaning on her stick with withered, trembling hands.

“Aye, indeed? And how long have you studied such matters, goody?” asked a neighbour, raising a laugh, amid which she retorted undaunted, “Needs no learning to see that! Whatever Father Cyprian—rest his soul!—may have been out of the pulpit, when he was there, he gave us plenty of Latin, and

roared until the very roof shook. Now this man spoke never a Latin word in his discourse from first to last; too proud is he, no doubt, to spend Latin on such as we."

"Aye, he is of gentle birth, and all such hang together," said a gaunt serf, with sunken flashing eyes. "Speak he never so fair, he is at heart the poor man's foe."

"Aye, aye, Father Cyprian was one of us; he knew that the common man cannot live as though he were a saint in a shrine," said the old woman. "I would the good man were here now. 'Tis not he who would have preached every Sunday and holiday, as though preaching were no solemn thing, but fit for all times. I like not that; 'tis lacking in reverence. And this Herr Basil, never named he one of the blessed saints, no, nor Mary Mother either. 'Tis a heretic, I tell you."

And she hobbled off, shaking her old head ominously.

"Aye, it is scarce respectful to speak straight to a man's Judge, as he would have us," said a pale artisan. "What are the saints for but to pray for us and turn wrath aside?"

"Why, how did men in the old times, before Mary and the saints were born?" asked another, with a touch of contempt.

"Out on you, Jobst Eich! Would you say that the holy Virgin and the saints were not always in heaven to help us and pray for us?" exclaimed a scandalised woman.

"Tush! I spoke not to you, dame, I spoke to Eich here. Answer me if you can, Master Schmidt!"

"Nay, I know not, any more than I know what brought you and Kaspar here within a church," answered the smith, with a laugh. "It was ever said the fiend shuns holy water."

"I came because men begin to speak much of this new priest's discourses, and I would hear for myself," said the hollow-eyed serf.

"And what think you thereof?"

"For one thing, that if all men be brethren, as he said, to most a younger brother's portion is given—blows and hard work, while the others get the money and lands."

"A true word! For us nought but new burdens every day—taxes are the only thing the nobles do not keep to themselves," muttered another, drawing nearer. "River, wood, and field, are all theirs only, while as for us, we may not so much as break one of the branches which God made grow for all—no, not though snow rise above our heads in winter, and the old and the children perish for lack of fire, even if we men fight through it."

"Aye, and in summer, when one hopes to lay aside somewhat for the evil months, what chance have we?" broke in a third, who owned a few acres. "This very day I saw half a dozen deer browsing in my field, and when I sought to scare the accursed beasts with shout and trump, they looked me in the face as if they were barons and counts each one of them. The evil things know as well as you or I do that we dare not so much as let fly an arrow against them. It were safer to harm a fellow-man than game or fish!"

"Aye, as I know well," said the serf Kaspar, slightly lifting a right arm where the hand was wanting. "And when last flood covered our fields with stones, had we one due less to pay, one day's work let off for our lord because we were ruined men or needed to clear the land ere it could bear again? Or, when widow and orphans are mourning, like Martha Riedl and her children yonder, can the corpse be laid in earth, be they ever so penniless, until the death-tax be paid to their lord? Call you these things brotherly? Yet we are all of one blood and bone, I trow!"

"Well, well, my masters, it has always been so and always will; the lords make the laws, and it is best to say nought, for who knows how far words may fly?" said an old man, interposing timidly and

anxiously, among the group of speakers, who became each moment more excited. "No man can get out of the skin wherein he was born. Some must be uppermost and some undermost while the world wags."

"By St. Joseph, but that is true," said a carpenter, swearing like a pious man by his patron saint. "And our lord is none of the worst, though his bailiff be cruel hard on us; he has never done such deeds as his cousin of Lichtenberg, for all his soft looks and words. Eugh! fearful tales are told of how he has dealt with his peasants. 'Tis not safe so much as to name him."

"Aye, hold your peace do, Kaspar; you have had one warning already," urged a little man, plucking him by the jacket. "Such talk as yours is treason, and treason means hanging and quartering. You should have more understanding."

"It would take a long needleful of thread to darn the holes in thine, Schneider," said Kaspar, raising a laugh at the expense of his interlocutor, the village tailor. "Such as thou had best leave treason alone; but there are some who can remember——" he lifted his head, and a sudden light kindled in his gloomy eyes—"if not the good days before the priests and lawyers brought in their accursed canon law, at least a time when those who

are below nearly got above, and the Golden Shoe may yet be uplifted, and the old song sung again—

‘Wer frei will sein, der folge diesem Sonnenschein.’ ”

As those once beloved and familiar, but long forbidden, words were sung, low indeed, but distinctly, a start and thrill went through the group; hasty and anxious looks were cast around, and many dropped out and hurried away.

“Hush, for all the saints’ sake! Mary and Joseph! if but a bird carry the song, or if the bailiff be within earshot, ’tis a hanging matter for us all,” urged several, recollecting with abject terror how mercilessly was suppressed all connected with the peasant rebellion of some years earlier, the banner of which had borne a peasant’s shoe.

“You are not wise, Kaspar,” said Jobst Eich, who had, however, looked up with an irrepressible flash of enthusiasm when the first notes of the prohibited song caught his ear. “You scarce ’scaped the halter when you were haled before the Freiherr for fishing in the river, and many a man has had his tongue slit for no worse than speaking of the Bundschuh.”

“All the same if there were but half a dozen brave fellows who would back me up, I would go to the castle and demand that at least no new burdens

be laid upon us. I should well like to speak my mind to a noble, face to face, for once."

"That day may come," muttered the other serf under his breath.

"Aye, it is ever darkest before the dawn," answered Kaspar; and then, turning suddenly and vehemently on the rest, "Do you know that all through the land there is a stir? that again it is like that we shall see if a priest's or a noble's blood be redder than a peasant's? Is it not so, boy? You go all over the country side and hear all that passes," he added, turning sharply on a slim, blue-eyed lad, who had listened silently, but with great sympathy and interest to what had passed. He nodded but made no other reply, for the priest had come out of his house, and was passing near, with a kind, grave bend of the head to those of his flock who lifted their caps to him, as most did, though some looked sullenly or boorishly away, and no one showed any alacrity to greet him, except the old woman who had accused him of heresy, and who now hobbled eagerly forward and obsequiously begged his blessing, which he gave, but with visible distaste, as if her bleary eyes and fawning humility were absolutely insufferable; but his whole expression changed into tender sweetness when a little child ran up and looked confidingly in his face.

He laid his hand gently on the flaxen head, spoke in caressing tones, and passed on still with the same sweet, softened look on his countenance, towards the forest. The old woman shook her head suspiciously, and hobbled away muttering to herself, and more than one spectator followed him with curious eyes, and wondered what took him into the forest at such an hour.

The parley which his appearance had interrupted was not renewed; the villagers had dropped away, and the miners and two or three more, after a word or two with Kaspar, had gone their way. Jobst Eich was the last to go; he spoke low to him, and each as they parted repeated the words which Kaspar had used a little while before, "It is ever darkest before the dawn." In a few minutes hardly any one remained on the green, except Kaspar and the boy whom he had addressed. The sun had now set for some time, and a soft, fragrant, dusky twilight reigned. A bat flitted by, chasing moths. The sound of the stream in the valley, and the rush of the falling Pöllatwasser, hardly audible by day, became suddenly heard. Sounds from a distance came on the ear; the owls began to hoot in the forest, the strange churring of the nightjar, and the call of the quails in the wheat fields thrilled through the air.

"Come, lad, it grows late," said the Burgstein serf, "our ways lie together for a while."

They walked on, side by side, in a way which denoted a certain confidential intimacy, though the boy with his easy, fearless bearing and well-cared-for air, seemed of another rank, almost another race, to the haggard, ragged serf, many years his elder, and already aged by want and suffering. They might have represented Day and Night. For a mile or more their way lay up the valley, and for some time both walked along in unbroken silence.

CHAPTER II.

"HILDEMUND, lad!" said the serf, laying his left hand suddenly on the boy's arm, "beware of this priest. I saw how you hearkened to him while he preached, and small marvel, since he moved me—me! who know what a priest is—but trust him not; trust no shaven crown. They are all alike, priest and monk, secular and religious, one starling ever chatters like another. Trust them? Was it not a priest who learned in the confessional of the great rising that was planned forty years or so ago, when Mary the Virgin sent Hans Böheim to tell men that there should be neither Pope nor prince, priest nor noble? And what ensued? The false priest told Kaiser Max, and hundreds of peasants were cut down, hanged, quartered, torn by wild horses. Yet the thing was told under seal of confession."

"Aye, so I have heard."

"And who imprisoned and burned Hans, know you that too? The Bishop of Würzburg, after solemn promise to give him fair trial, burned him on the green meadow before the castle. Dost think the

soul of a man foully murdered like his can rest? a soul who could not fulfil a mission from the Queen of Heaven? No, I tell thee; it must wander until it meet with time and place to begin the work again, and then it would enter into a body, and mighty things should be wrought," said Kaspar, a wild gleam lighting up his dark and sunken eyes. "And I think that time has come! I hear voices which tell me that I—I, Kaspar the serf. . . . But I must not tell thee these things. Only remember that priests are all alike—the Cardinal-bishop in his robes, and the Pfarrer Cyprian in darned cassocks, they all hold together, and make the priestly garment the cloak for all the seven deadly sins. And this Pfarrer Basil will be like all the rest."

"I do not think so," said the boy, thoughtfully.

"I tell thee he is! I have seen these men close. And if I believed thee traitor and fool enough to whisper a word of what I have told thee——"

"Nay, not I. If I confess any secrets they shall be my own, when I have any," laughed Hildemund; "but thou hast said little to me which might not be shouted from the house-top, though, may be, there is more behind. The stir grows in the land, and it may easily be that many here would rise if they had a Hans Böhme to lead them. But till then

thou shouldst talk less freely than to-night after evensong."

"True; my tongue wagged too fast. My blood gets over hot at times. It is easy to be wary of speech when a thing touches us not, but when it is nearer and dearer than our own soul. . . . Hark you, I know not whose voice thine sometimes echoes, but some things that thou hast said when we talked together were no boy's thoughts. Dost remember saying that if the peasants rise again, they should have somewhat to lay clearly before the Emperor? Those demands which thou didst suggest were wondrous just and well thought of—who had the brotherly heart to devise them? No noble, most surely, nor priest, for they love but their own order; no burgher, for the burgher cares only for his town and his family, and to sleep soft and live well; no peasant, for there was scholar's brains there. Who is it, I say?"

"Nay; peasants have brains, and can use them sometimes," answered the boy, laughingly, and evidently unwilling to answer the eager, imperative question.

"Dost speak of me? Aye; I had enough learning in the monastery school to set my brains to work, and may be, had my lord let the abbot have his will, I should be a monk now—a runaway one

perchance! But he would not lose a serf, though the abbot tried hard to keep me, for he thought to make something of me. That is nought to the matter in hand. I ask thee again who it is that can feel thus for the serf? There are not many, I wot. 'Tis one who has learning, and a gentle spirit. Wilt not say? Well, hold thy peace then. But I would I had his words on a bit of parchment. Wilt write them down? No! And wherefore? Wherefore, I say?"

He stopped, and turned his dark and threatening countenance upon the boy, who only smiled and shook his head.

"That bit of parchment were a death-warrant to thee and me, were any eye to light on it," he answered.

"None ever shall. None, save eyes as safe, nay, safer, than mine. Safer, I tell thee!"

"And if—under torture—it were told whence it came?"

"Torture! The torture has yet to be devised that could wring from me what I choose to keep secret," answered Kaspar. "I should know what pain is, too. Did I blench when this hand was chopped off from the wrist, and the red-hot iron seared the wound, and the blood hissed and ceased

to rush forth? Fear not that, lad. I shall not betray thee."

"But others might, and—and—I might myself, under torture; I cannot tell," said the boy, with a blush of ingenuous shame. "Who can say beforehand? If it were for myself only—but I have no right——"

He stopped abruptly.

"Wilt thou not ask him? Thy friend?" asked Kaspar, eagerly. "Surely he will not refuse, if he can feel thus for our wrongs. It is one who has been hard bested and has suffered much, that I see well; all who suffer are to him as brethren. I would I could have speech of him."

A strange smile passed over Hildemund's face; he made no answer.

"He should be one of us," added Kaspar, half to himself. "Yet I know not; there is indeed anguish and wrong that levels all barriers and makes lord and serf alike, yet shoe and boot cannot make a pair, and knight and peasant pull ill together. Theirs is the armed heel and we have the peasant's shoe. It may trample on the knight yet! Hush! there goes the priest. What evil is he after, wandering so late in the forest? Our ways part here, dear lad. Ask thy friend this thing, and no word, mark me well, to that honey-tongued priest."

He strode on, following a path through such tangled underwood that only a practised eye could have perceived it, and was out of sight directly; but his rapid steps slackened as he approached the miserable hovel which he inhabited. He seemed to hesitate whether to enter it; then, making up his mind, he suddenly stooped under the low doorway and went in.

There was no furniture at all, and the hut seemed empty; but a low moaning was heard from one corner, where a heap of dry heather and withered leaves was thrown together, and restless movements showed that some living, suffering creature lay there. Kaspar went up to it in the semi-darkness, stooped down, and said:

“Father!”

“Ah, ’tis thou at last,” a weak, quavering voice answered. “I thought to die before thou didst come back, and best so. Thou wouldst have it so, I know; old folks should not burden the young, though we worked and slaved for them as long as we could. ’Tis a hard world. Give me water; ’tis all gone. I upset the pitcher, and it flowed away, and no one to fetch me a drop all day. Yes, yes, a hard world, and one’s children are the hardest in it, and that hurts, you see, that hurts.”

Kaspar went out and refilled the pitcher, which

he held to the old man's lips, propping him up as well as he could with his maimed right arm.

"Nought to eat?" asked the plaintive voice, wistfully.

"Nought but this;" and Kaspar took from a hole in the wall a piece of black bread, which he put into the old man's trembling hands, though he had to put a strong force upon himself not to snatch it away. He had hardly tasted food himself that day, and hunger awoke cruelly and fiercely at the sight of food.

"It is not much, truly," said the old man, revived enough to complain with more energy. "Our lord is bound to maintain us when we be sick and old, but he sends me not enough to keep body and soul together. I have worked enough for him in my time; yes, or I should not be here now, broken down and racked with pains from head to foot. Three days in every week I had to work for him, the fine for him, the wet for me, and no pay for it; and then the road-mending, maybe just when the flax should be cut, or such crops as the deer and the birds left a poor man, just ready to get in; or else called off to drive game; and when one had anything to sell, the lord must have first offer, at his own price. He might feed me now I think."

Kaspar made no reply. To go to the castle and

ask the dole given by a harsh bailiff, and salted by the never-failing reproach for his own uselessness and the cause of it, cost a struggle which he often had not the power over himself to make.

"And the waters full of fish, and the woods of game, but they are not for such as we," the tremulous voice maundered on. "It would be easy enough to trap a bird or a hare, if one only dared."

"Aye, as I did when my mother lay starving four winters ago. Well, I have still one hand, why not risk that?" replied Kaspar, fiercely and bitterly.

The old man answered by feeble, querulous wailings, half blame, half complaint, indescribably pitiful, and falling like flakes of fire on the son, who, maimed and helpless, could do nothing to relieve or comfort him, and presently started up with a half-uttered curse, and went out of doors, and out of hearing of the piteous wail, "Kaspar, Kaspar, art leaving me? 'Tis all dark, and my pains be so sharp"—and threw himself down under a tree to lose himself in thought over the hopeless present and the uncertain future. He had been a good son to his parents until want and despair hardened him. He knew and shrank from the thought that the old man had said the truth when he asserted that Kaspar felt him a burden and wished him dead, though often, as now, giving the

last bit of food he had, and enduring keen pangs of hunger to satisfy, as far as possible, his father's. Misery and a vast sense of wrong to himself and all his class were fast killing every germ of mercy and tenderness which had ever existed in his heart. He had received just education enough to raise him above his fellows, and give him wider, though scarcely juster, views than theirs, and where they endured dumbly, hardly more able to express their sense of injustice and suffering than the brutes, he reasoned about it, and was maddened by what he saw and felt. He knew that in earlier times the only serfs were prisoners or bought slaves, and that it was merely the disorders in the Hohenstaufen times which had reduced the peasants to bondage, the nobles taking advantage of their defenceless condition to acquire their land, giving it back only on condition of service, which passed into thralldom. All this made little difference to most of his fellow-serfs, who were too dulled and ignorant to care for anything beyond brandy and daily bread; but it meant a great deal to Kaspar, and, indeed, there was such a sense of wrong abroad, such a ferment and stir in the minds of men, that even the serfs were more or less affected by it. One such man possessed by a sense of burning wrong as Kaspar might set a whole countryside on fire. On such

spirits as his the wild preaching of fanatics fell like a revelation, and there was a great deal of it just then. To him and others like him the simple, honest teaching of Luther seemed tame, while they counted his strong reprobation of rebellion against constituted authority as mere truckling to priests and nobles.

As Kaspar lay sleepless through the greater part of the night under the forest trees his mind was full of wild thoughts, impossible plans for setting all this mass of crooked wrong straight, fierce longing for vengeance on all in high places—schemes which he thought suggested by an influence outside of him, or was it within? and was he, as he sometimes believed, the representative of Hans Böheim, the murdered enthusiast, whom Mary herself had sent to aid the oppressed? There seemed fire in his heart and brain; visions danced before his eyes; strange sounds murmured in his ears; he hardly knew how the hours passed, or when at last he lost consciousness in heavy sleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE spell which Pfarrer Basil had cast on Kaspar's young companion was too strong to be broken by the serf's warning, and as soon as they parted the boy made all haste to follow the path which the priest had taken, hoping for an occasion to address him. It was readily found. He soon saw Pfarrer Basil walking in front, in a glade where the fir trees had given place to oak and beech and the fern grew high and thick on either side of the path, his head bent down, his step hurried and uneven, like those of a man a prey to mental pain and trouble. Hildemund heard him speaking in short, broken, half-intelligible sentences, and stopped a few paces off, fearing to be indiscreet in approaching him. His footfall could not have been heard on the turf, yet some consciousness of a human presence must have made itself felt by the priest, for he stopped and turned on the boy a wan and troubled face, gazing vaguely at him as if his thoughts were so occupied and so far away from the present scene that he could not gather them.

Hildemund was greatly struck and startled, and his murmur of apology seemed to rouse Herr Basil to self-possession.

"Ah, good lad!" he said, smiling his peculiarly sweet and gracious smile, whilst his face recovered the winning and tender expression which it had worn when the little children looked up into it as he passed through the village. "I saw thee in church, thou art a good listener."

"Surely, sir!" answered Hildemund, looking up at him with frank blue eyes, full of animated pleasure and interest, his tone expressing that when such a sermon could be heard, none could fail to listen. The priest smiled, with a pleased gratification that had something child-like in it. It was pleasant to him to be thus assured of what nevertheless he must have known already, that his discourse had touched his audience.

"Would your reverence come some day to our house? My mother would hold it a great honour."

"She was not in the church; is she sick then? Old she can scarce be," said Pfarrer Basil, looking at the boy, whose age could not have been beyond fifteen, and who, though very simply dressed, did not wear the peasant shoe, tied high round the ankle, nor the flapping peasant hat, and who seemed

in air and bearing altogether superior to the peasant class.

"No, sir, neither old nor sick."

"Yet she came not with thee?"

"No, Herr Pfarrer."

"And wherefore? Do you live too far away?"

"Two miles, scarce more, but it is a right lonely place, in the forest. You would not find the way, sir, but I would gladly come and guide you whenever you chose."

"She has brought her son up to be devout and well-mannered, as I see, but how is it she comes not to mass or sermon?"

The boy coloured and looked down. "She will come now, I am sure, your reverence," he said, with embarrassment, and then it struck Pfarrer Basil that from what had reached his ears concerning his predecessor, such a woman as the mother of this fair, courteous lad would probably be, might well shrink from contact with the profligate priest of Ilzthal. He sighed, and a cloud seemed to come over his face and change its lines into pitiless sternness, but they softened again as he turned to the boy and asked his name. "Hildemund Dahn," was the answer.

"And whose man are you?"

"No man's, sir," answered the boy proudly.

"How! no man's?" repeated the priest.

"No, my father was a free man."

"I might have guessed it," said Pfarrer Basil, mentally contrasting the courteous, yet fearless bearing of the boy with the cowed and sullen look of the peasant, even on lands where they were comparatively well treated, as on those of the Freiherr of Burgstein.

"Yes, my father was banner-bearer to Graf von Geyer—we are on his lands now; they run up here into those of Burgstein. The Graf is never here now; he has a post about the Emperor."

"And thy father was his banner-bearer? An honourable post!"

"Yes, sir, and he saved the Graf's life twice, but the second time he was sore wounded; it was in the taking of Aarburg, and he lay long sick in the house of Master Rohrbach, whither he was carried——"

"Rohrbach?" repeated the priest, musingly, and vainly trying to seize some association with the name which flitted before him. "Well?"

"It was there that he knew my mother, Magdalene Rohrbach, and because the Graf greatly favoured him, she was given my father in marriage, and our house and the ground about it made ours for ever. But he could never go to the wars again, so sorely was he hurt, so he became *Bannwart*" (head ranger).

"He lived only a few years; I scarce can remember him."

"And your mother lives there still? Did she not long for her kinsfolk and her old home?" asked the priest with some wonder.

"I know not; grandfather Rohrbach is long dead, and grandmother returned to Nüremberg, whence she came, and married again there. My mother speaks little of her maiden life; we could scarce be better than we are, in our own house, on our own land," said the boy, with pardonable pride.

"I would go with thee now, but it is late, and indeed I know not whither we have strayed," said Pfarrer Basil, looking round. "Canst thou guide me back until I can find my way?"

"Gladly, dear sir, I know all the forest round."

"And the birds and beasts, no doubt. What bird is it that sings so late when all the rest are hushed?"

"'Tis the Pfingstvogel, sir; he sits aloft and sings until night sometimes. I have heard that when he leaves us in autumn he crosses the sea to Africa, and comes not again until he can smell the ripe cherries in spring time."

"What, in Africa?"

"So it is said, sir. Can you see him yonder, a handsome fowl, but lazy; his wife does all the work

for the nest, and he preens his feathers and sings. The blackbird and thrush are his cousins, but he is proud and unfriendly, while they are tame, and come round our houses."

"You Thuringians love birds well. I see one or more in every cottage."

"Yes, sir, especially the crossbill, for it has a special blessing; you know it sought to take a nail out of the holy cross, and since then its beak has been shaped as you see, and it can draw all poison away that would hurt men, and yet take no harm."

The priest smiled a little, but made no comment.

"Better believe too much than too little," he said inwardly.

"And canst thou tell me what this is?" he asked, plucking a leaf of wood sorrel, folded for the night.

"Surely, your reverence. It is Mary's flower; it blossoms in her month."

"Dost thou know of what the triple leaves are the emblem, my boy?"

"Right well, and the strawberry too; these are both in the picture from Italy that we have at home."

"So you have a picture from Italy? I had not

thought to find one in these parts. You must show it to me when I come to your house."

"Most gladly, dear sir."

"You were not alone when you left the village. Who was that I saw with you—a tall, meagre, swart man with one hand?"

"Kaspar, sir; he was maimed for fishing in the Freiherr von Burgstein's waters, but it truly was to keep his sick mother from starving."

Hildemund could not read the look which passed over the priest's face. Killing game or catching fish was so grievous an offence that it never occurred to him it was abhorrence of the cruel penalty exacted which that look expressed.

"And the sick mother?" asked Pfarrer Basil, abruptly.

"She died, sir. Old Martin, Kaspar's father, was ailing too, and could earn nothing, and it was winter time, and the ways blocked with snow; no one knew they were in such evil case till Kaspar was set free from the castle prison, and came home and found her dead, and the old man too weak to seek help to bury her. But the Baron showed them mercy, for he remitted the death-tax; so they put her under ground."

"Ah!" said Pfarrer Basil, with a sarcastic curl

of his finely-cut, sensitive lips. "Aye, that was merciful. What is that?"

He spoke with a start and accent of dismay which astonished Hildemund. "A rabbit, sir; yes, see, there it comes, and a weasel after it; how the poor beast screams! Nay, then, master weasel, not this time, let my lord's game alone; and he sprang forward and snatched up the exhausted, terrified little fugitive just as the weasel was upon it. The rabbit lay powerless with exhaustion and terror in Hildemund's hands; the weasel glided swiftly into the fern.

"I would I had a stick here; the beast should not have escaped so easily," said Hildemund, caressing the panting captive. "There, get to thy burrow; see, sir, it lies still, too fearful to stir; now it lifts its ears; it will be gone directly."

"What a cry! Can a beast feel such mortal terror? It will ring in my ears all night," muttered Pfarrer Basil. He was quite pale and overcome. Hildemund, though a thoroughly kind-hearted boy, and fond of all live creatures, could not help feeling a little wonder and contempt at the effect produced by the rabbit's danger. "You often hear it, sir. If you did not know what it was you might think a hawk had screamed."

"In that sight and sound I see and hear the im-

potent anguish of all helpless, tortured things," said the priest, passing his hand over his brow. "My God, how dreadful pain is, wherever it is found!"

Hildemund only dimly understood his meaning, and more dimly still the over-sensitive nervous nature that could feel thus—a nature that must inevitably have suffered keenly wherever and whenever it existed, but was certain to cause its owner peculiar pangs at such a rough time, and in such hard and uncultured surroundings.

"There is Ilzthal," sir," said Hildemund, presently breaking the silence.

Pfarrer Basil started, roused himself, and bade the boy a hasty good night.

"Surely I have not displeased him?" thought Hildemund, with quite needless anxiety, for the priest was not thinking of him at all.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was one circumstance which alleviated, nay, almost reconciled, Pfarrer Basil to his exile to Ilzthal, and this was its position in the Thüringerwald. He had but to walk for a quarter of an hour to find himself in complete solitude, unheard, unseen, with, as far as he knew, no eye to watch him, no voice to break on his thoughts. The few farmsteads and cleared grounds were far apart; there were miles of unbroken forest where he was secure of meeting no human being. This was an inestimable advantage, for after any occasion which moved him, any contact with man, whether in the pulpit or in the exercise of his pastoral office, he felt an almost irresistible impulse to get out of sight and hearing, to be alone, and feel solitude secured to him, an impulse which drove him into the loneliest places which he could reach. These wanderings were strange and unusual at a time when man only felt secure behind strong walls and moats, and were viewed with great wonder and suspicion by the villagers, already jealous and doubtful of a pastor

so unlike any of whom they had experience. Father Cyprian, his predecessor, had been peasant born; his faults were theirs, and they understood and were tolerant of them, even while they lowered his office in their eyes. That a man should have a hasty tongue, lead as jovial a life, drink as much brandy, and give himself as little trouble as possible was, if not admirable, quite comprehensible; but a priest like Pfarrer Basil, with his cultured habits, his sternness to himself, and his desire to raise his flock to his own standard, was an alien, suspicious and dangerous. They came to hear him preach; he stirred their interest in spite of themselves, and gave them something to talk about; but they looked askance at him, held aloof, and shut their hearts against him with surly jealousy. He was among them, not of them; he belonged by birth, by manners, by culture, to the race above them—the ruling race. Moreover, some who had chanced to meet him in his lonely walks, and had spied curiously upon him, reported that he talked to himself or to some familiar spirit in an unknown tongue, and looked so strange and distraught that they had fled in terror, not knowing what might befall them if they lingered; and the stories grew with repetition, and fearful and anxious looks were cast on him as he went through the village, and he felt, without

knowing why, that he was an object of fear and dislike.

To a nature so sensitive and highly strung, so longing to reach the hearts and touch the souls of his fellow-men, this was peculiarly painful, and increased the mental struggle which often racked him. These were times when conscientious thinkers, especially among the ecclesiastics, suffered cruelly. Unable to shut their eyes to the terrible need of reform in the Church, and hopeless of attaining it; craving to preach pure doctrine, yet trembling lest they should be leading their hearers into schism; doubtful which was the more important, truth or unity; uncertain, too, whether to trust their own judgment when it ran counter to the overwhelming weight of the authority and antiquity of the great Church of Rome, and crushed by the intense loneliness of the man—especially the priest—who has stepped out of the circle in which his fellows move, and all his interests are concentrated, the robuster spirits made their choice after a great struggle, and the less strong stood doubtful, or succumbed, mute and despairing.

Pfarrer Basil was no Luther, neither was he an Erasmus, contented to rest half way to reform. He was not even convinced that Luther was not the author of immeasurable evil, yet he was so well

aware of the corruptions against which Luther was thundering; so unable to avoid denouncing them, that he was looked upon as a dangerous man by his ecclesiastical superiors, and shunned even by personal friends, and felt the isolation of schism while yet in the Roman fold, and believing himself a devout and reverent son of Rome. To send him to Ilzthal might indeed narrow the sphere of his influence, but it must inevitably make him brood more and more on the thoughts which even in busier scenes and a fuller life had haunted him day and night, in spite of fast, and prayer, and spiritual counsel, humbly sought and listened to. It seemed to him sometimes that his brain was giving way, and that he could not tell what was true and what false. A new interest, even such a trifling event as his meeting with the boy Hildemund, was welcome to a degree which made him smile at himself, and he found himself thinking repeatedly of the conversation between them, and the boy's gentle breeding and courteous air, and wondering what the mother was like who had brought him up. Either the way to the Bannwart's house was easier to find than Hildemund supposed, or Pfarrer Basil chanced upon it in one of his wanderings, for before another Sunday had come round he was standing on the plateau where it was built. There was a field or two cleared

behind it, without hedges, for hedges were forbidden, lest the game should be excluded from feeding at their will, but this was only a little space reclaimed from the forest, which extended on three sides, an undulating sea of wood, the deep green of the foliage varied by the late midsummer shoots, tender light red and yellow on the oaks, and almost silvery on the tall, plummy fir trees. On the fourth side the ground sank more abruptly, and from where he stood Pfarrer Basil could look as far as the Salz forest, where Charles the Great once hunted the boar, and the wild bull, and the great deer, all long extinct, and the eye rested on a fair view, far below, of hill and valley, a distant town, a castled crag, and a cloister, whence came the faint distant sound of bells, at which Pfarrer Basil bent his head and murmured a Latin prayer.

The Bannwart's house, like all in this district which were not mere hovels, was one-storied, raised on a stone platform, with a flight of stone steps; built thus apparently from habit, since here could be no kind of danger from water. The roof was very steep to let snow slide readily off it, and the upper rooms were reached by a little outside staircase, protected by a wooden roof, with a vine clinging to it. The door was open; Hildemund came out with a bird on his finger, to which he was whist-

ling. It put its velvet-capped head on one side and looked up with a curiously intelligent air at him, flying off his hand to his shoulder as he made a sudden movement of surprise and pleasure at seeing Pfarrer Basil standing there, and hurried down to welcome him.

"Dear sir! how good of you to come! My mother feared it might be importunate, or I had sought you before now. Will you please to enter?"

Herr Basil ascended the steps, and found himself in a room not only beautifully clean, but free from the oppressive stove atmosphere which was almost universal in the better class of houses. There was no fire lighted; fresh air was admitted, and much more light than usual; the room was wainscotted half way up, the panelling surmounted by a shelf on which stood pewter cups and platters and tall glasses; a stone basin and water tap occupied a niche, an unusual sight in Thuringian houses, though in towns the time had gone by when well or spring sufficed as a washing place. Lilies bloomed in a green earthenware jar, and like a lily was the woman who rose from her spinning wheel and came to meet the priest, dressed in the white linen gown which her own hands had spun and made, her light, shining brown hair just visible under the widow's cap, and a deep, untroubled peace, a serene

gravity in look and manner which made the very sight of her breathe rest and peace. Involuntarily Pfarrer Basil thought of the lovely woman whom "Meister Wilhelm" painted for the "Klara-Altar" at Cologne.

He gave his blessing as he entered, and she bowed to him with gentle respect, offered him a wooden stool—chairs there were none—and bade Hildemund set down refreshment before him after his walk. The fare was plain enough—bread, cheese, a little fruit, and country wine, but the glass which held it was, as Pfarrer Basil noted, of Venetian make, and the boy waited on him with such smiling pleasure, such eager welcome that Herr Basil accepted his service with satisfaction, and a feeling of being among his equals, or at least those whom he could treat as such without fear of being misunderstood came over him like a breath of warm, fragrant wind. His face relaxed; he looked round with smiling interest.

"This is the picture whereof I spoke, reverend sir," said Hildemund, following his glance and seeing it rest with surprise and admiration on a small wooden panel, hung against the wainscot.

Herr Basil rose, and looked at it long in silence. The painting represented a single angelic form, holding some musical instrument, and looking up

with unutterable ecstatic awe on things which human eye could not see nor human tongue utter. Something of that wondrous glory seemed reflected on the face and form. The winged figure, in its vivid robes of blue and crimson and white, stood against a background of pure gold, flowers at its feet, the mystic strawberry leaves and fruit among them—the lovely revelation of a great master, who had seen the worshippers of the heavenly courts in his visions.

“Even so must they look,” said the priest at last, after a long silent gaze, during which his own face had most unconsciously assumed the ardent wrapt look which he was contemplating. “The work of a great painter, and doubtless of one who walked close to God.”

“Yes, sir,” said Magdalene, in the sweet full tones which had pleased his ear when she first spoke on his entrance. “I have heard that he who painted it ever began his work with prayer, and when he drew our dear Master and Lord, it was upon his knees.”

“I believe it, verily. An Italian hand; such limning as this is not known to our more homely masters; Albrecht Dürer himself never gave us aught so heavenly. No, nor the masters of Cologne,” he

added, thinking again of the Klara-Altar and its child-angels.

"Yes, sir; my father brought it from Florence. It is but one part of a larger picture, an outer wing which folded over the middle part, he said. I know not what has befallen the rest."

"May they be kept as such a treasure merits! Your father was a soldier, belike?"

"No, sir; at one time a merchant, but he found it hard to lead such a life as he deemed a Christian man ought, while seeking after riches, for sin sticks close between buying and selling; so he early gave up his business."

"Few thus view the means of attaining wealth," said Pfarrer Basil, surprised. "Methinks your son said his name was Rohrbach?"

"Yes, sir; he was a peaceable, patient man; he went little into company, and was of few words, and very thankful to God."

"And despised riches, it would seem."

"What he chiefly desired, dear sir, was that God might work nought in him but with his active concurrence, and he do nothing without God."

The priest looked attentively at her, struck with the ring of the mystic theology, akin to his own habit of mind, and so simply uttered that the thoughts were evidently part of her daily life.

"That name of Rohrbach seems familiar to me, yet I know not why," he said, perplexed. Magdalene made no answer, but Hildemund said eagerly,

"It may be your reverence has heard of Berthold von Rohrbach, from whom my grandfather was descended."

"Berthold! Aye, that is it," said Pfarrer Basil, with startled recognition. "I heard of him once when at Basel. How, you are descended from that heretic?"

"Ah, sir," cried the boy; "was it so wrong to teach that a layman enlightened by God can teach as well—speaking with all respect, dear sir—as a priest? It was for that he was burned!"

"A monstrous doctrine!" ejaculated the priest.

"Did you hear how he had a fair wife and dear children, and was most happy—so happy that he feared it was sin, and would have renounced all and become a monk had not Nicolas of Basel bidden him rather be thankful, and fulfil his duties as husband and father," the boy continued, too eager to realise Pfarrer Basil's view of the daring layman.

"My son, you speak overmuch; his reverence will hardly care for these matters," said Magdalene, reprovingly, and Hildemund coloured and looked abashed, but Pfarrer Basil said kindly,

"Chide him not; I had not heard this tale,

further than that the fair wife died, and two of his children, and then he became a priest, but still taught, alas! doctrines condemned by Holy Church, and died the death of fire. Yet he was surely a good man, and constant unto death," added Pfarrer Basil, as if to himself. "A hard thing! None can know how hard, save those who have endured it. Let not us who know not what it is to lay down life dare to cast stones at them."

He had seated himself where he could see the picture, and his eyes were fixed on it, but he withdrew them, and went on in quite another tone.

"But truly I acquit him not of sin, for he had surely done better for himself and the Church by silence and a holy life than by proclaiming doctrines which unsettled the minds of others."

He spoke sharply, almost irritably, as if answering inward questionings rather than addressing Magdalene and her son. "When the Church speaks the individual must give way."

He paused so decidedly for an answer that Magdalene was forced to speak, though apparently, like her father, she was a person of few words and an inward life.

"I cannot say, dear sir. It is likely he only asked himself, 'What does the Master say?'"

"Alas! how many answer that question their own

way, and so find warrant for all ambition, and greed, and presumption!"

"If it be so, methinks they do know at the bottom of their hearts that they desire not to hear what He says, but to hear Him say what they wish. He is ever near us, but we are not always near Him."

"*'Mecum eras et Tecum non eram,'*" murmured the priest, sighing deeply; "and thus we strive and beat ourselves in vain, and our hunger is not stilled nor our thirst satisfied."

"It were not so, dear sir, if we remembered that we may not seek our own ends in any creature, whether temporal or eternal; then should we surely attain to perfect satisfaction and content," said Magdalene in her calm even voice. "All we have to do is to endeavour to will nothing but what God willeth, and wait on that He will have us to do. It was so that Master Rohrbach taught, and Suso and Tauler, and so that they lived."

"I know those names, but thought not to hear them thus from your mouth," said Pfarrer Basil, sternly. "Were they not those heretics who profanely called themselves the Brethren of the free Spirit?"

"Nay, God forbid!" she answered, in horror far

deeper than his own. "It is blasphemy to name them together!"

A flush had come over her cheeks, a light to her eyes; she seemed stirred to the depths of her soul.

"Surely, reverend sir," she continued, "you know better than I how, when the Pope laid under interdict all places which acknowledged as Emperor Ludwig of Bavaria two hundred years ago, some towns and districts were not released for over twenty-six years; the churches were shut, the pious deprived of the means of grace, the wicked left unwarned. Then certain good men, seeing a whole generation consigned to perdition, felt called to go to such places, and speak to the perishing; for surely, sir, neither Pope nor Bishop may withhold the blessings of religion from the many for the sins of the few?"

Pfarrer Basil was silent. The thought, however daring, was not new to him, and a throng of spectral questions which he felt it sin to admit awoke afresh.

"These men called themselves Friends of God," Magdalene continued, "and He taught them by visions and revelations. There were twelve of them, bound by no vows, but held together by the bond of love and work for one Master. Nicolas of Basel

was their head, and they lived a holy life, and many laid down their lives."

"I have ever heard they were arch-heretics, and deemed them one with those others whom you seem to hold in such horror."

"God will know them apart," she said, in her usual calm tone. "But if you would indeed know what they taught you should read what they have left us, reverend sir."

"Frau! you know not what you do when you tamper with heresy," said the priest, with a look of exceeding pain. "The wisest, the best may not touch that perilous stuff unhurt. Yet" (and a strange wistful look came over his face) "I would be unjust to no one willingly, and to judge of these men I should, as you say, know their works."

She hesitated. There was evidently a struggle in her mind. "True, father, and with all respect, I think they would lead you into more peace than you have perchance found," she said at length; "and though that is a lesser matter, for they need not to be justified of men, it is but fair to themselves. But I pray you to remember these books are my chiefest treasure, next my son."

She rose, and unlocked a carved cupboard, where were parchments and a few printed books of later date.

"These my father inherited," she said, taking down several, "and they are the most precious things I have to leave my boy. Yet, sir, if you would read them, they are at your service."

"You show great confidence in me, Frau, for it is no light thing to own to possessing such books as these."

"I know it, father, but that risk must be run, lest I sin by withholding them from a soul that needs their teaching."

He glanced at the manuscripts, as if at once strongly drawn to them and yet as strongly repelled; then, suddenly pushing them away, with the same look of pain which had struck Magdalene before, he said, "Here, too, even here, the temptation meets me! Take back your books, Frau; you know not what you are doing, and if you value your soul cease to study such lore."

Hildemund looked at his mother, amazed at the passionate vehemence of the priest's tone; she silently replaced the books in the cupboard.

"You are a scholar, it would seem," said Herr Basil, evidently trying to resume his ordinary tone. "Few laymen, let alone women, are clerkly enough to read such crabbed pages. And have you made this fair boy a scholar too? Nay, he should be at school; boys soon grow over a mother's head!"

"Not my Hildemund, sir."

"So say all mothers; yet here perchance it is not mere motherly fondness. But a tall lad like this should be at school among his fellows."

"Nay, sir, you will deem it a mother's softness, but I could not send my boy where perchance he would be beaten fifteen times in one day, for no fault, but only to break his spirit. And what would he learn?"

"And you, my boy, are you content to stay here?"

"There are some whom I would be very loth to leave, sir," answered Hildemund, colouring.

"And how spend you your time, my son?" asked the priest, to whom it seemed a matter of course that he should put any questions he pleased. "I saw a field or two, and a garden of fruit and herbs, but you do not spend your time over them?"

"No, sir; many come to my mother for salves and simples, and I seek plants both for her and the apothecary at Rothenfels, and if our folks need aught I fetch it for them when I go thither, and I carry books to the cloisters and farms in my pack."

"Books!" said Pfarrer Basil, with a priest's instinctive suspicion of study among the laity. "And what books?"

"Oh, many, sir; pamphlets and other writings

to the cloisters, and to the farmsteads, and the burghers in many small towns. All kinds of works —‘Das Kleyne Planeten büchlin,’ and ‘The White Knight,’ and ‘Sodonca, Queen of Pritania,’—and many others.”

Pfarrer Basil’s face clouded. The century of reform had begun with a bull introducing the censure of books, and forbidding to buy or sell any not previously approved by the Church. But still from Cologne and Nüremberg, Augsburg and Basel, poured forth broadsheets and pamphlets, as well as legends and chapbooks and learned treatises, and however deep was the ignorance of the lower classes, serfs often being sternly forbidden to learn to read or write, the townsfolk eagerly bought such works as came within their reach, and Luther’s writings, even where most contraband, were circulated from hand to hand, often in convents and monasteries, where they worked mightily. Pfarrer Basil knew it, and he frowned. It was obviously not for nothing that Hildemund and his mother had Berthold von Rohrbach as an ancestor.

“An idle life and a perilous, dame. Unwise and blameworthy are you surely to bring up the lad thus.”

“As yet I have seen no leading to another life, sir,” she answered, with gentle dignity.

"Have you no kinsfolk who could help him to some wholesome trade, or to be a clerk, if he incline to learning?"

"Yes, sir, I have kinsfolk who no doubt would receive him, but I must wait until I am enlightened that I do well to send him to them."

"And where dwell these kinsfolk?"

"Some in Augsburg and Ulm, but my grandfather and mother in Nüremberg."

"The Pegnitzstadt! I know that fair city well; it may be their name is not unknown to me?"

She made no answer, until directly asked the name of her mother's family, and then there was a perceptible hesitation before she answered, "My mother was a Paumgärtner."

"How!" exclaimed Pfarrer Basil, with a start, "a Paumgärtner, say you? But how then——"

He stopped short. Hitherto he had addressed her with a certain unconscious condescension, as her superior both by birth and office, and it was with an absolute shock of astonishment that he learnt she belonged to those merchant princes who rivalled the Fuggers themselves, and were known throughout Europe for their vast commercial enterprises, with houses at Venice and Archangel, Lisbon and London, in the Levant and in the ports of

the Adriatic. Magdalene perfectly understood his thoughts.

"Your reverence would ask why, when my kinsfolk are, as the world counts, rich and powerful, I remain here," she said, while Hildemund, who had rarely heard her speak of her family, came nearer and listened eagerly. "When I was left a widow I had little heart to care for aught earthly, for my treasure was doubly in heaven, and presently I found that if I returned to my mother, herself a widow, but about to marry a Pirkheimer, she, who had ill liked my wedding Kilian Dahn, would seek to dispose of my hand again, and this might not be. Moreover, I saw my way to being useful to the poor folk here where I had lived with my dear husband, and it was clear to me that I was to abide in my place."

"But the boy! Was it well to throw away all the advantages which such kindred could give him?" asked Pfarrer Basil, scandalised to find a grandson of the great merchant house of Paumgärtner, and a connection of the hardly less well known Pirkheimers, leading the humble life which Hildemund had described.

"Nay, sir, perchance he had lost more than he gained. Those who are reared in luxury mostly care little for the kingdom of heaven. It may be

that one day I am shown that he should leave me, and seek my kindred—none are left of my father's family—but as yet it has not been so, and I think he is content to stay with me."

"That am I," said the boy, emphatically, though there had been a kindling of interest and eager curiosity as he listened. Herr Basil could hardly believe what he heard. This calm indifference to all those things which the world most grasped after, this quiet waiting on Providence, seemed to him so strange, so enviable, and so rare, that he could hardly realise it.

"*Beati immaculati in viâ,*" he murmured; "even in the cloister seldom saw I such faith." And then, aloud, playfully alluding to the bird which was jealously trying to attract Hildemund's attention,

"Well, then, stay here, and train thy little bird, my son, and obey thy mother. How hast thou so trained thy little Dompfaff?"

"Ah, you know what we call it, dear sir!" cried Hildemund, delighted, and stroking with one finger the velvet cap which no doubt gained the bullfinch the name by which Pfarrer Basil had called it. "It is easy to tame these little things; if you take them young and treat them tenderly they will give you all their heart, and even refuse to leave you if you

set them free. See, it will not leave me though I try to drive it away, but scolds and flutters back."

"'Tis somewhat to have even a bird that is so loving and faithful," said Pfarrer Basil, sighing.

"Ah, dear sir, may I train one for you? It were too much honour. I would offer you this one, but it is promised to the little Fräulein Rosilde, and I must take it as soon as I can to the castle, for she is of an impatient humour, and loves not to wait for what she desires. Already I fear it likes me too well easily to be happy with anyone else."

"Yes, I would gladly have one," said Pfarrer Basil, seeing how much pleasure his assent would give the eager boy. "But see it be young, my son, not one which knows what freedom is and pines after it. So the little lady of the castle is a friend of thine?"

"Nay, sir, you are laughing at me. But I like well to pleasure her, for she is like a little queen; and the old seneschal, Walther of the Scarred Countenance, loves her better than his life, though he calls her Dornröschen, and says she is as full of thorns as of sweetness. *He* will have no one say 'tis pity she is not a boy."

"Ah, true, there is no other heir."

"No, sir, the next heir is Graf von Lichtenberg, the Fräulein's cousin, and it is said that the little

Burgfräulein is one day to wed the Graf's son, Wolfgang—more's the pity."

"So! Is Graf von Lichtenberg in these parts? Methinks he has no lands here."

"No, sir, no lands, and by all accounts it is well; for all he speaks so smoothly, I know not that he is better than Junker Wolfgang, who is never so joyful as when he can make man or beast suffer. But the Graf comes here for the chase, to the castle of Graf von Geyer, who lends it him, or for his own matters—I know not what."

"And the little maiden is betrothed to Wolfgang von Lichtenberg?" said Pfarrer Basil, who had some knowledge of both father and son, and whose face expressed pity and regret.

"That I scarce know; but it is talked of, sir, and the Junker is often at the castle, and sometimes Freiherr von Burgstein laughs loud and is well pleased by his lording it; and then again he is angry and swears he will have no cockerel crowing in his courtyard."

"You know much of what passes at the castle?"

"I am often there, sir, for Walther is very kind to me, and Heinrich the armourer lets me help to furbish up the head-pieces and breastplates, and help him in the forge. And the little lady often comes there with her waiting maid, and claps her

hands to see the sparks fly; or she bids me show her the suits of mail and the weapons that hang in the hall, and tell her all I can of them; and I know every dent in them, for Heinrich has told me who wore them, and in what fights and tourneys."

The boy's eyes sparkled as he spoke, and his colour rose with eagerness. Pfarrer Basil shook his head, smiling, and said, looking to Magdalene: "A wild hawk, Frau; one day you will have to loose the jesses."

"Yes, it may well be so, reverend sir; I do but wait till the time comes," she answered, calmly, little guessing when and how it would come, nor how steeped in bitterness it would be.

CHAPTER V.

THE times had almost gone by when the country nobility held it their born right to capture travellers and put them to ransom, or disturb markets and plunder burgher folk. The Swabian League came down with a heavy hand on such marauders, and public opinion began to set strongly against them, though here and there some audacious Götz von Berlichingen still defied League and Kaiser, and sent feud letters to his fellow nobles, or even to such proud cities as Nuremberg; or lay in wait for travellers returning from one of those great shooting matches which had taken the place of tournaments, and robbed them of the prizes they had won; or seized and put to ransom the messenger of some rich prelate. The position of the nobles was an uneasy one in this transition time. There was no natural or healthy outlet for them in the State; they hated the new system of government which stopped their highway robbery, and fostered peace, and

blindly struggled against the downfall of their long-uncontested supremacy, and against the growing importance of the burgher class. The towns were rising to a formidable independence, enriched by increasing trade and commanding the luxuries which intercourse with the New World was introducing, while the nobles grew poorer, and, at once envious and disdainful of the riches and luxury of the citizens, sought to augment their revenues by the only means now in their power, grinding all they could out of their peasants. Thus, whatever happened, whether the towns grew rich or the nobles poor, the peasantry only suffered more and more; and, although the cities on the whole sympathised with them, because the nobles were unpopular, hardly a voice was ever raised on their behalf. Although the scarcity of labourers, after the Black Death swept over Germany, made the peasants more valuable, they were considered as existing merely to serve the higher classes. They had no rights, no claims, no individual existence. Sometimes their lord lived among them, like Baron Burgstein; sometimes they were at the mercy of a bailiff, viceroy of an absent master, as on the Geyer'schen lands, whose owner either lived in his own house at Fulda, or followed the Emperor in his wars; but it made little difference. The peasant

was not absolutely tied to the land, except in rare cases. But this advantaged him little, so crushing were taxes and dues, so powerless was he to appeal against the most flagrant injustice. Perhaps those were a little the worst off who had absentee lords, and this was an increasing evil, for the nobles began more and more to live in towns, or attach themselves to princely houses. Schloss Geyer was almost always empty, unless occupied by that Graf von Lichtenberg of whom Hildemund had spoken to Father Basil, and this was not seldom. He was a man altogether of the new time—crafty, politic, secret, and ambitious. At one time he had been but a poor younger brother, but the death of two nephews had made him heir to a considerable estate. He was not popular, yet many men of high rank and position found him a useful ally, and he had known how to make himself valuable to the Swabian League, and acquire the favour of the Bishop of Würzburg. It was a time when a keen and sagacious politician might hope to attain almost anything. Had not the Brandenburg family gradually raised themselves to power whose future height no one could calculate? Already one was a Markgraf, another Archbishop of Mainz, and a third of Magdeburg; while the fourth was Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. Why should not von

Lichtenberg be equally successful? Policy, not war, was his forte; he had nothing in common with the rough, fierce generation just gone by; he preferred to attain his ends peaceably, though he had no scruple in removing anyone or anything which stood in his way by the readiest means. His powers of scheming were so great that he would have been a far more successful and dangerous man than he was but for his esteeming them so highly that he often undervalued an adversary. More than once this had spoiled a well-woven plan, but he had not yet learned his lesson. There was yet another danger in his road. His son, for whom he planned and schemed unweariedly, was of quite another type to himself, and might probably upset all the fabric so laboriously reared. It seemed as if Wolfgang von Lichtenberg reproduced some ancestor, fierce, wild and cruel, haughty alike to equals and inferiors, with ungoverned passions and a rude sense of honour, which made him an instrument altogether unfit to his father's hand. Such as he was, however, the Graf set all his hopes upon him, and foresaw a brilliant future for his fierce wolf cub, the first step to which was his marriage to the little heiress of the Burgsteins. Freiherr von Burgstein was not one of the impoverished country nobles. He had married a rich heiress, and had lived on

his lands, followed the chase, drank deeply, and let his revenues accumulate, caring little about them, and hardly aware of his own wealth. But his cousin, Graf Lichtenberg, could have enlightened him. The two men had nothing in common but the bond of kinship, and it was no small proof of the dexterity with which von Lichtenberg could deal with those whom his interest bade him please that he was on good terms with his cousin, who prided himself on being a man of the old times, and allowing nothing new-fangled to come near him. The very faults of Wolfgang, his violence and insolence, were more acceptable to the Baron than von Lichtenberg's more polished and courteous manners; but the Graf exercised a power over him to which he reluctantly submitted, and had come to believe the project for the marriage of his little daughter with his cousin's son his own devising. The Lichtenbergs were his next heirs after this girl, whose sex was a never-ceasing vexation to him, and no alliance could have seemed fitter. Yet in his heart he did not like it, and there were moments when he wished angrily that he had any excuse for breaking off the project. Graf Lichtenberg was well aware of this, but he trusted to his own diplomacy and to the Baron's well-known tenacity in any project once favoured by him to keep all secure, and he pressed

for a speedy betrothal, for though the boy was scarce fifteen and the girl but eight years old, they were by no means too young for this bond according to the ideas of the time. It was the Graf who paid all the attentions to the little bride elect. The boy, with strength and passions beyond his age or his control, and with no touch of chivalry to soften him towards the child-bride, either neglected her scornfully or treated her as his chattel, with a rude familiarity highly displeasing to the little maiden, who equally resented his domineering and his condescension, entertaining her father hugely by her outbursts of fiery indignation, and making him prophesy, with shouts of laughter, that one day Junker Wolfgang would find himself under his wife's slipper. "I will wring her neck first," the boy would mutter, glaring on the little offender with his great gloomy eyes, and the old seneschal, who loved the child better than his life, would shake his head and inwardly augur ill for his darling. There were others who misliked the prospect too—the pale, sickly Freifrau, who had given no male heir to the family, and counted for little more than a shadow in the castle, dreaded the alliance, but dared say no word to cross her husband, and it was looked forward to with deep aversion by the retainers, who foresaw an ill master in the young Graf, who al-

ready treated them with rough and haughty insolence. No one liked him less than Hildemund, when he chanced to come across him, and Wolfgang on his side honoured the Bannwart's son with a very special aversion. Hildemund was gentle, but he was fearless, and his quiet indifference to the young noble's insolence was insufferable. Hildemund regarded him with a spice of contempt for his uncouthness and violence, shrugged his shoulders at his unmannerliness, and passed out of his way, thinking no more about him; but Wolfgang felt towards this boy, whom he could not seize and crush, a fierce longing to have him at his mercy, and see him made to suffer, to cry out for pity, which sooner or later must break all bounds.

Although Hildemund was free born and inherited peculiar immunity from taxes and dues, yet the gulf between the Bannwart's son and the young noble was far too deep and wide in days when birth counted as a divine thing, for it to be possible for Hildemund to call Graf Wolfgang to account for anything he might please to say or do, and this could not be but galling to a boy high-spirited, if gentle; and Hildemund heartily wished that he might not find him at Schloss Burgstein, as he climbed the steep upward way thither with the bird which he had tamed for the little Rosilde. He was very fond of the little

Freifräulein, whose imperious baby ways lent her in his eyes but a charm the more, contrasting as they did with the small figure and childish features, which made her look much younger even than she was. Dornröschen, indeed, "a rosebud set with little wilful thorns," but a rosebud still, full of sweet promise in his eyes and in those of old Walther the seneschal, the last blossom on the ancient Burgstein stem, too precious to be plucked by so rude a hand as that of Wolfgang von Lichtenberg.

Schloss Burgstein stood as if part of its rock, so inaccessible, so proudly overlooking the valley below, that there was little need for watch or ward; but if stricter guard had been kept, Hildemund would have entered unchallenged, for he was known to everyone in its precincts, and he passed into the courtyard exchanging greetings with the retainers who happened to be there, and noting that grooms were holding the horses of the Graf von Lichtenberg and his son, while Kunz, the favourite attendant of the Graf, was saddling his own, as if for speedy departure. Hildemund offered no greeting to this man, whom he knew by reputation to be the Graf's *âme damnée*, and Kunz paid him no attention as he passed, but continued to saddle and bridle his horse without a word to anyone. He was a short, swart, broad-shouldered fellow, silent and surly. The Graf

seldom went anywhere without him. Hildemund went towards the great hall doorway, close to which he saw the seneschal, sitting on an oaken settle in the sun, with a large boarhound at his feet. Walther had served two generations of Burgsteins, and had been in many battles with the late lord, bringing thence honourable wounds, which had won him the appellation of the Scarred Face. His hair was grey, and he was stiff with age, but his blue eyes were still bright and his strength still considerable. His hearty voice welcomed Hildemund while yet at a distance.

"Ho, lad! thou here? Hast brought the bird this time? My little lady asks for it each day. That is well, and a dainty little Dompfaff it is," as Hildemund opened the door of the cage in which he had brought his pet. "Where is she? She and Barbara were here but now. Bärbele, I say! Nay, then, I will go myself and seek her. Look to your work, lazy loons!" he shouted across the court to a group of men idling near the Graf's horses. "Here, Barbara girl! where are you?"

Barbara was his grandchild, and waiting-maid to the little Fräulein. No one answering, he rose and went to seek the child. Hildemund restored the bird to its cage, and waited. From a distance came the ringing clang of the armourer's hammer.

Hildemund could almost guess by its varied sound when he put aside a breastplate and began to mend a gorget, or laid that aside for a spear or cross-bolt. Horses were stamping, grooms talking, steps passing, dogs barking and clinking their chains, all mingling into a hum of sound and busy life. Tired of waiting, Hildemund entered the hall. The great room was empty, to his surprise. There was a huge table in the middle, with a long, heavy bench on each side, and settles fixed against the walls. At the further end was a smaller table, with a cover thrown over it, and a couple of leathern chairs with green cushions; near them was a smaller one for the little Rosilde. The windows were filled with painted glass, with armorial bearings alternating with scenes from battle and tourney. In the angles of the walls were great iron-bound cupboards; dim old family pictures hung grimly here and there among helmets and shields and armour, some dented and dark with age and use, some inlaid with gold and very costly, testified to the wealth of the Burgsteins, for only the richest of the nobles owned such mail, or possessed such swords with hilts adorned with gold and precious stones. Hildemund knew them all, as he had told Pfarrer Basil, and his eyes sought them as if they were old friends. No one came, but he thought he heard voices in an inner room, that of

the Freiherr rising stormily, and another, persuasive and cautious, that of von Lichtenberg; and the boarhound heard them too, and lifted its head now and then uneasily, growling low. Hildemund stooped to caress it, and it looked affectionately at him, and beat its tail hard on the ground by way of answer, for though fierce and uncertain of temper, like all of its race, it was devoted to Hildemund, whom it had known ever since it was a puppy, with a foolish face and large soft paws, staggering under its attempts to walk. He and the little Rosilde could do what they would with it, though it would growl menacingly if anyone else, even its master the Freiherr, meddled with it. To Wolfgang it always showed such aversion that old Walther declared he must have threatened it, and that it never forgot or forgave a threat. Struck it he certainly had not, or he would scarce have been alive to tell of it. Their hatred was mutual, and a suppressed but angry growl first warned Hildemund that Wolfgang was near. He came through the hall, riding-whip in hand, his hat with the black and white feathers of Lichtenberg shading his eyes, but he pushed it back with a haughty and impatient gesture as he caught sight of Hildemund, and said, curtly, "What art loitering here for? Get to thy fellows in the courtyard."

Hildemund flushed hotly, but answered with courtesy that he was awaiting Walther's return.

"What hast there? Give it hither," said Wolfgang, noticing the cage in Hildemund's hand. "Dost hear me?"

"Pardon me, sir, but this bird is not mine; it is long promised to the Lady Rosilde," said Hildemund, well aware that a live creature in Wolfgang's hands would leave them either maimed or dead.

"Give it here, I say," repeated the boy, advancing a step; "am I to speak twice?"

He lifted his whip threateningly, and Hildemund's spirit rose.

"I have said the bird is the Burgfräulein's, sir, and I give it to no other hand than hers," he said.

"Take that, then, for thy discourtesy," shouted the young noble, crimson with rage, and while he struck furiously at Hildemund with one hand, he sought to seize the cage with the other. Springing lightly aside Hildemund avoided the lash, and at the same instant he opened the cage door, and the bird fluttered up into the air in wild alarm. The baffled Wolfgang flung himself upon him, and gripped him in a frenzy of rage such as his slender opponent could not attempt to resist.

"I will kill you, base varlet," he muttered; "hey, how like you this?"

Hildemund was at his mercy, but an unexpected ally was at hand. With a long growl the boarhound reared himself up, and sprang on Hildemund's assailant. Well was it for Wolfgang that his doublet was thickly padded, for the beast's teeth met in it, and though he flung Hildemund from him, and struggled with all his bull-like strength to shake himself free, it was in vain, until both Hildemund and the seneschal hurrying up, peremptorily ordered the dog to let go. Even then he loosed his hold slowly and sullenly. Wolfgang stood glaring at it for an instant, as it couched in reluctant obedience, still growling, and with angry eyes fixed upon him. Then, with so rapid a movement that no one foresaw what he was about to do, he drew his dagger, and plunged it up to the hilt in the dog's throat. "So, thou hast thy meed," he said, savagely, and thrusting the animal with his foot as it fell in a death struggle before him. "Wilt bite me again, thou beast? Aye, moan, moan again! I like to hear thee. Bite if thou canst now, accursed brute. What, thou dost need another stroke? Take it, then. Keep off, master seneschal, or you may come in for one also now my hand is in. Ha! Rosilde! come here and see a fair sight!"

"Sir, sir, what have you done?" cried the seneschal: "my lord will never pardon this. His

favourite hound! Ah, my little lady, here is sad work!"

"What has he done, that wicked Wolfgang?" cried the childish voice, full of pity and anger, as the little one ran up, outstripping her maid. "Hundolf! oh, poor Hundolf! poor Hundolf!" and she flung herself over the dog, which lifted its dim eyes to her, and feebly tried to lick her hand, even while it shivered in death.

"Did you do this?" she cried, standing up, with her eyes flashing through tears as she faced the boy, who answered, with a laugh—

"Aye did I, and would again. You will not have the beast to save you from my hands next time," he added, turning savagely on Hildemund, who answered by a glance of unconcealed dislike and contempt.

"This is ill done, Junker," said Walther, gravely and sternly; "how befell it?"

"I have no reckoning to give to you that I wot of," retorted Wolfgang; "I will answer it to your lord."

"And that you shall! There he comes. Herr father! See here! Come!"

She darted past old Walther, who would have detained her, and flew to meet her father, whose heavy steps were now heard as he strode into the

hall, with Graf Lichtenberg beside him, seeking to silence if not to calm him.

"Talk not to me of the Swabian League or of the Brandenburgers," he was exclaiming. "Out on the burgher pack! I loathe the very name of them. What, put down Duke Ulrich to set them higher? I tell you he shall know it all before I am a week older. How now? What is it, my girl? What!"

"My lord is ill-pleased already, and when he sees this work," muttered Walther in great anxiety, as he saw the Freiherr stride forward and stand speechless, while he gathered the sense of the child's passionate accusations.

"So it has pleased you to slay my best hound, young sir," he said at last, his face flushing dark-red through all the sunburns which browned cheeks and forehead, as he looked alternately at the dead animal and Wolfgang, who stood in sullen defiance.

"The beast turned on me," he answered.

"So! And why did it thus?"

"Because, if I needs must answer your questions, my lord, I sought to chastise yonder knave, who was saucy, and the beast took part with him."

"He had brought me my bird, and it is lost!" cried Rosilde, through wrathful tears.

"Peace, my young mistress. So, Junker, you

play the master here—already!” thundered the Freiherr, his wrath breaking all bounds. “’Tis full soon. A gentle lord he will make one of these days. What say you, Walther? Tush, cousin, spare me your fair words,” as the Graf sought to interpose. “Can I not see how it will be with my vassals, and lands, and moneys when you and your son have the rule here? Truly the League and the Brandenburgers may pray for that day. Aye, but it is not come yet—no, nor shall. Waste no more soft speeches, cousin of Lichtenberg, my mind is made up. My little lass is not for your son; he crosses my threshold no more. Get you gone, boy, for I can scarce keep my hands off you. Get you gone, I say!”

“I go sir, and there was small need to bid me not return where a hound and a saucy varlet are held more dear than plighted word and noble blood.”

“Art mad, boy?” exclaimed his father, who had repeatedly tried to interpose. “Good cousin——”

“My lord, it is but a boy!” urged Walther, as, after a pause of utter amazement the Freiherr made a stride forward to inflict summary punishment there and then on the offender; “and under your own roof!”

“Aye, that is true, and the young rascal has

courage. To beard me to my face! Yet I like that better than— No, I will hear no more, cousin; you have my answer, and what I said that I shall do, were you fifty times my kinsman. So you are warned. You had better follow your son, who is mounting even now in the courtyard. So he goes, and I am well rid of him. Poor beast, I would cover thee with gold if I could buy thy like again," he said, looking down sorrowfully at the noble hound lying before him. "How came all this evil, boy? Speak freely."

Hildemund told the tale as briefly as he could, and the Freiherr's face darkened again.

"All for a silly fowl! Why didst not let the Junker have his way?"

"The bird was promised to the Lady Rosilde, my lord," Hildemund answered respectfully but fearlessly; "and, moreover, I would not see anything that could suffer in the power of the young Graf."

"I hate him! I will not marry him! Poor Hundolf!" cried Rosilde; "and my lady mother will not that I should."

"How now, Mistress Malapert?" said the Freiherr, with a frown. "I have yet to see thy mother or anyone else question my will and pleasure."

"But it is not your pleasure that he should come back. You said so, and you cannot take it back, Herr father. Ah, see my little bird!" she cried with a sudden change to ecstasy, and clapping her little hands, as she saw the bird, more alarmed by unwonted liberty than by any danger which could befall it in captivity, come fluttering down from a helmet on which it had perched, to Hildemund's shoulder. Her unwelcome suitor was forgotten at once; she was half consoled even for the poor hound's death. While Hildemund showed off her new pet, and she called her maid to hear how to treat it, the Freiherr was saying apart to his trusted old retainer—

"Thou wilt scarce guess what von Lichtenberg urged on me, and hardly would take a refusal. He would have me keep it secret, I trow, but I am no treason-keeper for him or any other. It seems that the League, whose very name is gall in my mouth, and the Brandenburgers have tidings that Duke Ulrich has a plan toward for the gaining back of his duchy, and they would lay an ambush and seize him, as once they sought to do before."

"Ah, false villains!" muttered the old seneschal. "Have they not worked him ill enough already?"

"It would seem they think not so, and my fair

cousin sees a fair occasion to gain favour with the pack of them. Would anyone think he had blood as noble as my own in his veins, Walther? But so it is, and he has pledged himself to bring men and moneys to aid in this excellent device. But men he cannot get without money, and money he has not, so he comes to me!—to me!” repeated the Freiherr with an angry laugh, “and reasons so sweetly that honey is nothing to it. At first I knew not whither he was tending, and well nigh promised all he desired; but so encouraged, he spoke more plainly and the thing grew clear to me, and I gave him plainer words than he liked; he blenched and grew as white as a priest’s alb. I was a fool ever to trust a man who looks as if he lived on the seven lean kine of Egypt,” said the burly Freiherr, striking his own broad chest.

“But is all indeed over between you, my lord?” asked the old seneschal anxiously.

“Aye, so I think. I got hot, and small marvel, and swore that my girl was not for son of his since he sided with the burghers against a noble lord like Ulrich, for whatever the Duke may have done he is one of us—and this matter of the poor hound came as if to clench it.”

“And the Duke, my lord?”

"He must be warned, and that right soon. We hunt the boar to-morrow, and then hey for Hohen-twiel. Have the poor beast yonder buried quickly, Walther. I would I had lost any but Hundolf, my best hound, and fond of the little one. Dost remember how gentle he ever was with her, and how when scarce more than a babe she would ride round the hall on his back? 'Tis a brave little lass and a sweet," he added with a touch of unusual tenderness, as he looked at the child standing smiling before Hildemund, her bird on her finger, while her maid stood respectfully behind her. "Pity she is but a girl!"

"Nay, my good lord, she is the sweetest blossom that ever the rose of Burgstein bore," said the senechal, looking with fond pride at his little liege lady.

"But a girl! nothing but a girl! and the old name falls to the distaff," answered the Freiherr, and turned gloomily away.

Meanwhile the two Lichtenbergs, closely followed by their attendant, Kunz, were riding down the steep and difficult way from the castle. Not a word passed till the walls were far overhead and they had reached comparatively level ground, for while Wolfgang was swelling with injured pride and

passion, his father was striving to master alarm and anger—anger directed as much against himself as his son, for he felt with keen mortification that he had made a false move and played his game like a very novice, overrating his own powers of persuasion, and forgetting how obstinate and irritable were the prejudices of the man whom he sought to bend to his purpose. He kept silence, knowing his son's temper, and secretly dreading to produce an outburst from Wolfgang, who in certain moods was beyond his control, though in calmer moments the lad had a certain awe of the father so unlike himself, who never lost the rein of self-control, and attained his ends so skilfully—too skilfully the boy, honest if brutal, might learn to think. When at last impressed by the entire absence of reproach or remark, he looked half-defiantly, half-questioningly at the Graf, he was struck by his paleness and the set look about his lips. It never occurred to his limited intelligence that there might be other matters of disquiet beyond what regarded his own conduct, and he muttered, "I would I had killed the saucy rogue; he had been rightly served."

It was meant rather as a conciliatory advance than as defiance, though it did not sound like it.

"And I would you had chosen another time to

chafe von Burgstein," was the Graf's cold and quiet reply.

"Never will I enter his gates again! I know not, sir, how you endured to see your son rated like a hound before groom and squire. I saw their saucy looks right well. I cross that threshold no more while the Freiherr lives."

"So think I too, and so topples over the fair scheme I had built up for thee."

"I care not; but if I did I would have the girl yet. She is mine, and unless with my good will neither king nor kaiser shall have her."

"Save your wild and hurling words, boy," was the Graf's contemptuous answer, "and ride on, for I have to speak to Kunz here, and he who cannot rule himself is no company for grown men. Ride forward."

Keenly stung, but honest enough to feel the rebuke deserved, Wolfgang revenged himself on his horse, striking it sharply and repeatedly, making it rear and plunge and carry him far ahead at a break-neck gallop. His father looked after him frowning, with a gesture of discouragement. "A wild bull and no more; he should be Von Burgstein's son, not mine," he muttered to himself in bitterness of spirit. "What fortunes so sure and strongly built

but they may be overthrown by such a witling? Yet a man can but work with what stuff he has, and truly I myself have arrantly played the fool in laying myself open to Dietrich; yet who would have thought that a fish whom, plunge as he might, I have ever landed at last, would thus baffle me? Hark ye, Kunz," he continued aloud, beckoning his attendant to ride beside him; "my tongue has tripped to-day in speaking too freely to Dietrich von Burgstein, led on by his seeming assent, and seeing not that he listened so calmly only because he took not my meaning. Now will he set forth as soon as his boar hunt is over and babble all I told him to Duke Ulrich."

"What ill can a banished man do you, my lord?"

"Tut! I fear not Ulrich, but the fiend was in my tongue when I entrusted the secrets of Kasimir of Brandenburg and the League to this kinsman of mine. If I turn him not from his purpose I may count my head laid under the doomster's axe. His star has ever been malignant to mine."

"If it be thus, he must not go."

"No, he must not go. I will seek speech with him to-morrow when he rides to the chase, and try to repair the folly I have wrought. But I know

him; even if the thought of the sport left room for aught else in his mind, he would be harder to turn aside than yonder rocks, taking the matter as he does."

"He shall not go, my lord."

"Nay, nay, wish no ill to my kinsman, Kunz, though true it is that the boar is a perilous beast to chase, and the sport is dangerous. But we must walk warily lest we find ourselves in deeper slough than ever."

"No ill, surely, unless to hinder a worse one, noble sir."

His master made no answer. Words were needless and might be dangerous. He fell to thinking of the peril he had fallen into, and of his immediate and pressing need for a large sum of money, for he knew well that to fail in what he promised the League and the Markgrave would be to show himself not worth their bidding for, and deal a fatal blow to his own ambitious hopes. He thought, too, of the breakdown of his plans for eventually securing the wealth and lands of Burgstein to his son, for even if, as was little likely, the Freiherr could be soothed into renewing the project of the marriage between Wolfgang and Rosilde, the Graf knew his son too well to hope that he would recall his vow never again to enter the house where

he had been mortified before the household. Only if the Freiherr were no more its lord could that project be put into execution. Then, indeed . . . Graf Lichtenberg rode on in silence.

CHAPTER VI.

It had not been without reason that Graf Lichtenberg had counted on co-operation from his kinsman in the schemes which involved further misfortune to the banished Duke of Württemberg. Had the Burgsteins owned no lands but the wild forest district around their castle, they must have only counted among the innumerable poor nobles of Germany, but marriage had brought them large possessions in the fair and fertile duchy, and thence the main portion of their wealth was derived.

The high-handed dealings of Duke Ulrich, which had brought the League down upon him and made rebels of the greater part of his subjects, were highly distasteful to the Freiherr, who, though holding aloof from the rebellion which had driven Ulrich to fly from his duchy to the distant fortress of Hohentwiel, would rail so loudly against him that Lichtenberg was led into believing his wrath against the Duke greater than his haughty aversion to what he called "the burgher pack." It was not so, however; whatever Ulrich's offences, he was lord and Duke, and

it seemed monstrous treason to his order that a knight and noble should lend himself to the plans of the League and Brandenburgers, and betray a sovereign into the hands of low-born enemies. Night and sleep intensified rather than lessened the Freiherr's hot displeasure, and it was hot indeed, as Walther the seneschal did not fail to remark, since it was hardly diverted by his favourite sport of hunting the wild boar.

In the fresh early morning he rode down from the castle, and drew rein at the foot of the Burgstein in the valley. Walther had to remain at home with a few reluctant companions to keep the castle in his lord's absence, but every groom and man-at-arms who could obtain leave to go was there, rejoicing over the variety in the monotonous daily life of the household. Numerous peasants were also in attendance, ordered out to beat the coverts, and though it was felt as a hardship that some of the few free days left them by Church festivals and their lord's usual claims should be taken from them whenever their services were needed in the chase, there was satisfaction in the slaughter of some of the chief enemies of their crops, and the boar hunt was so full of perilous chances, so dangerous both to sportsmen and dogs, as to excite the peasants, who ran comparatively no risk, almost as much as

the huntsmen. Old men and women crept out to see the start; children stood in open-eyed delight; nay, it was not certain but that Pfarrer Basil himself was standing in his doorway. Certainly his old housekeeper was looking over the fir hedge of the churchyard. Hildemund came running up just as the little train rode down from the castle; he had heard the day before that the chase would take place with sunrise, and had persuaded his mother to let him join it. Frau Magdalene consented readily; she steadily encouraged the boy in all the manly exercises within his reach, and Hildemund, light of foot as a young roe, and knowing the country perfectly, would follow the chase on foot for a whole day unweariedly, thereby often gaining the hearty commendation of the Freiherr, to whom nothing in the world was so dear as this sport. His brow cleared, and his voice rang out cheerily as he listened to the reports of his chief huntsman, gave his orders and called to his dogs, powerful greyhounds, such as Snyders loved to paint, with long wise faces, and tails proudly arched over their backs, only waiting for the signal either to plunge into the deep coverts east of the Burgstein, where wolf and boar lurked as in a fastness, or to breast and climb the pile of rocks on the north, a more inaccessible fortress still, and fill the forest

with the "gallant chiding" which would tell that the prey was unharboured.

If Graf Lichtenberg intended to have a word with his cousin there was no time to lose, for once the chase begun, not for the kaiser himself would the Freiherr have paused. It was with the angry impatience of a man brought back to an unwelcome subject from which he had escaped that he saw the Graf ride up, followed by Kunz, and he cut short all greeting with, "Join the chase, an you will, cousin of Lichtenberg, though you are not apt to love it overmuch, but no more words. It stands as I have said. I go to the Hohentwiel with the morrow's dawn. Thanks to that Junker of yours I go to the chase without my poor Hundolf to-day. It sorely mars my pleasure; I can get me a son-in-law when I will, but never another hound like my poor brute which he slew. On to the Hunenstein, my men; we will lay on the dogs there."

Riders and runners obeyed with alacrity; Graf Lichtenberg shot a glance bright and keen as the blade of a poignard at Kunz, whose swarthy face made no response, though he understood perfectly. That dull, impassive look of his was one recommendation in his master's eyes. They followed the huntsmen leisurely until near the rendezvous, when the "sweet thunder" of all the dogs' mellow voices

told that the chase had begun, and down the up-piled rocks of the Hunenstein came three wild pigs, frantic with alarm, leaping like goats with incredible activity and sureness from stone to stone, and plunging headlong, with the pack after them, into a dense tangle of broom, wild clematis, and brushwood. The screams of affrighted jays and magpies, the deep bell-like voices of the hounds, the cheers of the huntsmen, echoed and re-echoed from the rocks, and filled the air long after all were out of sight, and an eagle, which had soared up far above the tumult, was slowly preparing to return to her nest again.

The taunt which the Freiherr had flung at his cousin—one in his mouth so bitter that it testified to extreme ill-humour—was absolutely just. Von Lichtenberg was no sportsman by nature, in this as in all else belonging to another time and race than his kinsman, while his son loved the chase passionately, exulting in the rapid motion, the various risks, the terror and the death of his victims, and was now sullenly raging at home because both pride and his father's commands forbade his joining in the sport. But as means to an end Graf Lichtenberg would become as keen a sportsman as anyone, and he kept near enough to the Freiherr through all the changes and chances of the sport

to obtain more than one opportunity for speaking with him, in the pauses when a boar had been killed or had baffled its pursuers, as more than once happened, by disappearing in some impenetrable jungle, or among the rocks, in some secret cave where the dogs failed to find it, or found it only to perish on its tusks. But all he got was a look cast over the Freiherr's shoulder, and a curt, "It stands as I have said."

Kunz too had kept up with his master, and he was still near, though his horse began to show signs of distress when the sun was at its noonday height, and a huge boar was discovered basking in the heat on a rocky plateau, with copsewood clothing its sides and dense forest for leagues around. At the same moment a couple of young pigs crossed the track, and although two of the best and most experienced hounds continued to climb the rocks, all the rest of the pack and every huntsman in sight followed them except the Freiherr, who saw them go with a laugh, delighted to keep this crowning piece of sport to himself, and give this formidable foe the deathblow unaided. Looking round for a moment he saw von Lichtenberg ride up along a charcoal-burner's path. "See, cousin!" he shouted, all his good humour momentarily restored; "rare sport! The beast will take to the

Eschthal, my word for it. Look! there he comes! A 'solitary,' and of the biggest—I mark him for mine. Well done, good dogs! Farewell, cousin! this is my way, but I counsel you not to follow." And horse and man went crashing down through the trees towards the lonely valley known as the Eschthal, whither long experience enabled the Freiherr rightly to divine that the beast would make its way. The laugh and voice was borne back by the wind. Graf Lichtenberg looked at his companion.

"The beast will turn to bay in the Eschthal," he said. "He cannot keep up this pace long, but since he is for none but the Freiherr I will even join the rest. Do as thou wilt."

"Aye," said Kunz, and dismounting he fastened his horse deliberately to a tree, and made for the Eschthal by a shorter way, impossible for a mounted man even so reckless as the Freiherr. Graf Lichtenberg set his lips fast as he rode rapidly away, guided by the distant sounds to the main body of the sportsmen, who were now in full career, in a comparatively open part of the forest, with the prey in full view, and far too much bent on their sport even to notice the absence of the Freiherr, and the Graf, who rejoined them unobserved, while his

kinsman was galloping in a contrary direction towards the Eschthal.

Never had "his bosom's lord" sat so "lightly on his throne" as now, when galloping under the forest trees by the shortest cuts that his horse could take, guided by the cry of the two gallant hounds, his heavy horn at his back, his hunting knife at his side, the sunbeams shining on the tree tops, and gliding through the branches on mossy ground or strong green fern, in whose broad fronds russet and yellow tints were showing here and there, telling of autumn. Presently the cry of the dogs changed into a sharper, angrier note, telling that they were pressing the boar hard, and the Freiherr smiled, well pleased that the brave hounds should justify his prediction, and bring the beast to bay exactly as he had foreseen.

The Eschthal was a valley overhung with rocks and crowned with forest, singularly wild and solitary, although but a mile from the spot where the Bannwart's house had been built. A shallow limpid stream flowed through it, with a stretch of green short turf on the nearer side. But a little way further lay a dense covert, so dark and tangled and marshy that could the boar reach it he would probably baffle his enemies and return leisurely to his lair, getting back as soon as possible, as the manner

of this creature is, to the track already traversed that day. But when the Freiherr came crashing down the precipitous side of the valley, with small regard for man or horse, he saw that the beast had swum the stream, and was standing at bay against a rock, half buried in the soft soil, its back arched until the long black bristles stood up all along it, its eyes glaring in terror and fury. The two hounds were swimming as near it as they could, seeking in vain to seize it, but undaunted, though now and then the boar turned its head with a fierce and sudden movement, and struck furiously with its formidable tusks; and even as the Freiherr sprang from his horse, sounding the call upon his horn which gave notice that the game was at bay, he saw one of the dogs caught on the long sharp tusks and tossed bleeding and gashed into the current.

"St. Eustace!" shouted the wrathful Freiherr, unsheathing his hunting knife, and advancing into the stream, ready to give his blow before the boar could charge him, with the sure and fearless stroke of a practised huntsman. But even as he raised the gleaming blade, a short boar spear flew from an unseen hand, and struck him on the side of the head, and he dropped prone on the very tusks of the charging beast, which struck savagely at him again and again, and then, dashing the second

hound aside, rushed out of the stream and disappeared into the forest. An instant later a man who had stolen up, stooped over the prostrate figure, and stirred it with the spear, as if to make sure that life was gone, then as swiftly retired. The valley seemed quite empty, but for the corpse lying in the shallow water which flowed over it; not a sound broke the stillness but its flow. The evil deed seemed to have been done unseen, unknown. It was not so, however. From an opening in the rocks there came a figure so strange and spectral that it appeared the fitting witness of so unnatural a crime. Wrapped from head to foot in a pale garment of some coarse material, even the face so covered that only the dark gleaming eyes were visible, it might have been some ghost condemned to wander in penance within this solitary valley, had not the Lazarus-rattle in the hand told that this was one of those outcasts from mankind over whom the burial service had been read even while they lived, who were counted as dead to family and friends, and shunned even by those bound to works of charity and mercy, the wretched company of lepers. The muffled figure stood at the edge of the stream, looking down at the body lying under the rippling water, but made no movement to touch it; a leper might not defile even the dead by his

touch. But a moment later Hildemund came head-long down the rocks, and reached the stream with a breathless cry of horror.

"My lord—slain! slain! Ah, my dear lord! The boar—no, never boar mastered him! Ulfric, how chanced this?"

"Hast no guess?" was the answer.

"None, none. Mary Mother, how ripped he is and gashed!" exclaimed the boy, as he drew with much difficulty the heavy lifeless body to the bank, and knelt beside it. "Ah, my good lord, what evil news for Burgstein!"

"Think you this is all a wild boar's work?" said the leper, significantly. Hildemund looked up suddenly, then down again at the dead man, whose hat had fallen off and floated away. He saw a deep wound on one temple.

"Did boar-tusk do that?" he asked, doubtfully; "or fell he on a sharp stone? or what befell?"

"Nay, rather ask one who went but now away, swart and broad-shouldered, who came to fetch his boar spear."

"Kunz, the Graf's squire?"

"Aye, even so," answered the leper; and Hildemund, in his horror and amazement, forgot to note that the name seemed perfectly familiar to him.

"Kunz!" he repeated, aghast. "But then——"

"Hist! the hunt comes this way; doubtless they heard afar the Freiherr's horn; it were not well we were seen. Back into the bushes, and come not forth while they are here for your life, but return to me when all are gone," said the leper; and Hildemund obeyed instantly. The leper retired into his cave, whence, unsuspected, he could observe all which took place. He heard the distant shouts and laughter, and the fall of the horses' hoofs muffled on the turf as the troop rode gaily down the valley, and noted the sudden check of surprise as they espied the Freiherr's horse running loose, and heard the startled outcries as one after another sprang from his saddle and gathered round the dead man. The clear tones of the Graf came distinctly to his ear, and made him start as with a sudden sharp pain: "No boar's work this, my masters; the beast must have charged him after he fell. Belike it was a stroke as he plunged overheated in the water."

"Aye, so it must have been," said the head huntsman, with sincere regret; "and there lies poor Griffin, dead too; and I see not Gunther; either the good hound is dead also, or away after the boar. An evil day! Who shall tell my lady?"

"That must I, and a sorrowful task it is in good

sooth," said the Graf; and everyone recollected that all which stood between him and the lordship and lands of Burgstein was a child, destined, until the quarrel between himself and the Freiherr, to be his daughter-in-law. It seemed but right and natural that he should give all commands, and the men looked involuntarily to him for orders.

"Level your spears," he said to four of them; "the body must be borne back to the castle. How now, Kunz!"

He started as the little crowd moved apart, and he perceived his man-at-arms standing livid and trembling near the dead body. "Aye, man, 'tis a sorry sight, but what makest thou here without thy horse? Hast had a fall? Art hurt? Come here and answer me," he added sternly, as the fellow continued to gaze stupidly on the corpse.

"I—I fell," he muttered, "on the rocks yonder."

"Thou art dazed, sirrah!" said his master, sharply. "Hast fallen on thy head? Doubtless thou didst hear the Freiherr's horn like ourselves—wast not behind me?—and hurried over rashly down these rocky banks. Was it so?"

"Aye, my lord," answered Kunz, feeling the power of the look bent on him, which seemed to constrain him to reply as his master willed, though

he kept casting furtive and terrified glances towards the dead body.

"His wits are astray," said the Graf contemptuously. "I thought thy skull thick enough to be proof against blow or bullet. Where is thy horse? Fell he too? So! Then the wolves will have him ere night. No, no, let none waste time in seeking him; would no worse loss had befallen us. Move on, my masters."

The four men raised their dead lord on their boar-spears, and the train moved slowly on, in silence, or speaking under their breath, while the bright sunshine poured down upon them, and earth and sky were full of pitiless and joyous beauty. Peasants, left behind by the riders, gradually joined the mournful little party, and learned with wonder and some regret the loss of a master who had on the whole been far from hard to them; and yet the predominant feeling was merely surprise, and a general dismay lest the passing of the lands to a new heir should involve a tax, or extra days of labour in its stead. There was a marked difference between the feeling of the tenants and serfs and that of the men-at-arms and immediate retainers. The Graf rode last, and let a little space gradually intervene between him and the rest of the train. Then he beckoned Kunz, and asked in a tone, low,

but so ominously menacing that it startled the man into full attention, "What means this, knave? Wouldst play me false?"

"No—no, my good lord," he returned, imploringly, "not so by all the saints;" and then, after a hasty glance round, he added, "I was making my way back to the Donerwald to find my horse, when a stone gave way, and I fell and lamed myself."

"What fiend brought thee back to the valley?"

"I heard Berthel the huntsman and Gottfried breaking through the thicket by a short way, my lord, and knew they must see me, so I made as if I were from the same direction and had but oustripped them, and they were too greatly in haste to tarry or note aught about my horse being gone."

"Fool, didst not remember that thy dripping clothes might have betrayed thee to every eye had any had leisure to mark thee? And why stand all amazed and distraught? Hast never seen a dead man before?"

"Aye, many, my lord; but there was more than a dead man," said Kunz, his teeth chattering and his swarthy face paler than before. "How could a dead man reach the bank?"

"What sayst thou, sirrah!" exclaimed the Graf.

"My lord, he fell in mid-stream, and was dead

even before I reached him, I swear it; but he had called on St. Eustace ere he fell, and either the saint or the foul fiend bore him to the bank."

"Thou art wont to be keen and clear of wit," said the Graf, after a pause. "Yet there must have been some one in the valley."

"No one, sir, for I could see from end to end from where I stood and watched the Freiherr. St. Sebald! how he came down the rocks! I thought he would meet his end before ever he reached the stream—and I looked back once more as I climbed the crest; no soul was there."

Graf Lichtenberg rode on in dark and troubled thought. At last he spoke: "If any there were we shall learn it, and that soon. Now get thee hence, and bear the tidings to my son; but, mark me, thou hast bungled this matter, and thou knowst I do not lightly pardon him who serves me ill. Enough; buy thy pardon by thy discretion henceforward."

Whatever Kunz's superstitious terrors, and they were almost beyond his control, his fear of his master's displeasure was even greater. "I will, my lord, I will," he stammered, fearfully seeking a relenting glance from those pitiless eyes.

"'Tis well. Begone!"

"The horse, my lord; it were not well any found him tied."

"True; thy wits are coming back. Turn him loose ere any find him."

Kunz obeyed in haste, though he shuddered at having to pass that dead and ghastly body, carried on the levelled spears—all that was left of the burly, stout-hearted baron who had ridden out in the dawn with such gallant cheer. Although he saw his master scorned the thing, Kunz was profoundly convinced that either saint or devil had marked his deed, since the murdered man had invoked his patron saint, St. Eustace, just as he fell, and was, therefore, under his protection, and no doubt his death would be avenged. The retainers who saw him ride forward guessed rightly that he was bound to Schloss Geyer to tell the young Graf Wolfgang what had befallen, and his departure awakened neither surprise nor comment. He fulfilled all his errand punctually and unobserved, and Wolfgang obeyed his father's directions to join him at Schloss Burgstein that evening; but Kunz did not accompany him, and early the next day he sought the village church and found Pfarrer Basil, just returned from a night of vigil and prayer at the castle, whither he counted shortly to return for the burial of its lord. He was delayed by this unexpected penitent. Many a long year had passed since Kunz had heard mass or knelt at a con-

fessional, but he did not trouble himself about the long roll of past sins, about which he felt small concern or apprehension; it was the vengeance of St. Eustace which he desired to be protected against.

When he left the church after his shrift he looked and felt just as usual. He had confessed, and necessarily absolution had followed. The penance enjoined he could avoid by paying some broad pieces, for indulgences were to be had by the score from licensed dealers in them, and every crime commuted at a fixed rate of payment. Kunz had his account well settled, and discharged it from his mind. Nothing which the horror-stricken priest could urge had touched him; he had done his share; he was ready to pay his money, and heaven was bound to cancel the debt. He could snap his fingers at St. Eustace's displeasure now, and he went cheerfully up to the castle to seek his lord.

Scarcely had the troop of huntsmen and peasants left the valley when Hildemund came impetuously out of his hiding-place, and stood before the cave of the leper.

"I see it all," he cried. "Dolt that I was not to know it at once; this was why the Graf and that squire of his, less base than his lord, conferred to-

gether in the Donerwald, and that traitor left his horse tied and hastened away. Oh, villains! they were plotting the death of the Freiherr, because yesterday——”

He broke into a hurried account of what had taken place between the kinsmen, and the vain attempts of the Graf to have speech of his cousin at intervals through the day.

“Aye, clear as yonder stream,” said Ulfric, bending his head. “Then they saw you not when they conferred in the Donerwald.”

“None saw me, not even the Freiherr. I had noted Griffin and Gunther, his two best hounds, climb the rock overhead, unmarked by Gottfried or any of the rest, because just then the pack made away eastward, and I guessed that the Freiherr was minded to slay the great boar alone, so I clomb a tree to be out of the beast’s course, and mark what line he took, knowing what rare sport there would be. Alas! the prey was statelier than I looked for,” said the boy, his eyes filling with tears. “And now, how to bring this foul deed home to them who wrought it?”

“Hearken, Hildemund. Your word will avail nought against a lord’s, and mine counts not—now,” said the leper, with sudden bitterness; “you can do nought openly.”

"I will fling this felon deed in his face!"

"Tush, boy; to what avail? Think of your mother. He can crush you both as he would a fly. Who but a few men-at-arms would hearken or believe you?"

"Then shall he do this thing and no vengeance overtake him?"

"I say not so; time brings many chances and changes to all but the dead," said the leper, with the same touch of hard bitterness as before; "but for aught you can now do, aye! If you will hear my counsel get you to the castle, and enter unmarked in the tumult there will surely be, and secretly tell all your tale to Walther the seneschal."

"Yes, yes, you ever fall on the right counsel," cried Hildemund, who had curbed his impatience with a deference which showed a strange and unusual relationship between this outcast and himself. "I will do just what you say."

"Speed then, but be wary, for much may hang on what you do. This Graf's arm is long, and he crushes what he grasps."

Had Hildemund been less moved and absorbed in the matter in hand he would have again been struck with the manner in which the leper spoke, as if all concerning Graf von Lichtenberg were familiar to him, but he could only think how to

pour his tale most speedily and safely into Walther's ear. Ulfric watched him speeding down the valley, and stood long after he was out of sight before he withdrew to his retreat.

As the leper had foreseen, Hildemund entered unmarked in the confusion and stir pervading the castle; but it was long before he could approach the seneschal, who was distraught at the sudden death of the lord whom he had truly loved, filled with apprehensions for the consequences of his death, and wanted in a hundred directions at once. When at last Hildemund could pluck his sleeve and try to attract his attention, he answered roughly: "What now, lad? I have no time for thy matters on such a day as this. Get thee home; the Junker is to be here anon, and my good lord is not among us now to shield thee. Out of my way."

Hildemund could only obey and move aside; but he did not go home. It was unwelcome news that Wolfgang was expected; there was danger in staying, and it was altogether repugnant to him to lurk and hide from his eyes, yet he could not leave the castle without telling his tale, the more that it might be impossible to see Walther at a later time, for the days when Hildemund came and went at will were plainly over. The Graf had, in a calm, matter-of-course way, assumed the command of all

things, and the old seneschal found himself, with a heavy and sore heart, merely carrying out his directions.

Presently Hildemund saw Pfarrer Basil, who had been duly summoned, enter the courtyard, sad and grave, crossing the threshold of the castle for the first time to pray by its dead lord. He entered the chapel and knelt near the corpse laid in the choir, whose stones would soon close over the last lord of Burgstein. Torches were burning round the bier, and the Freifrau wept near—a pale, shadowy, sickly figure; while the little Rosilde, worn out by her first passion of childish grief and terror, lay fast asleep with her head against her mother's knee. Hildemund slipped quietly into a dark corner, and prayed too. "*Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine!*" the priest was saying, and Hildemund's tears flowed as he whispered the words after him. Sometimes one, sometimes another, of the household came in and silently joined in the prayers for the dead. Day was fading, and as the chapel darkened the torch-light grew brighter, revealing the bare, unadorned walls of the building, which was cold and stern as a prison, and wavered on the stones of the pavement, and the pallid, disfigured face of the corpse, strangely livid in its shining, flickering light. The clanking of spurs was heard, and drowned the low

murmured prayers of the priest. Graf Lichtenberg entered, followed by Wolfgang, who looked awed and uneasy, and crossed himself with unwonted devotion at the sight of the dead man against whom he had so lately been raging. He felt as if his maledictions had had something to do with his sudden end, and a touch of fear and awe visited him.

"All has been done as you desired, noble sir," said the old seneschal, in a low, unsteady voice, as he too stood looking with a great heartache at his dead master, by whom the little child, now the only representative of her family, the only heir of its lands and wealth, lay sleeping almost as soundly as her father, only that tokens of a violent death were imprinted on the ghastly countenance of the man, and sweet, rosy life on that of the child. The pale widow raised eyes of mingled fear and entreaty to the Graf, as if conscious that she was in his hands. He dipped his hand in the vessel for holy water, and sprinkled a few drops on the dead body of his cousin, and then moved aside, to let his son do the same. Walther, too, stooped over his lord, but before he could fulfil the pious office he started back in affright. He thought that a few drops of blood were trickling down the livid brow. Fancy, or the uncertain light, might have deluded him, he could

not tell; but it was with a shock of horror that he recalled the universal belief that a murdered man would even in death thus denounce his slayer. He looked from the florid, heavy countenance of Wolfgang, with its dull look of uneasy awe, to the pale, set face of the Graf, who had uttered, or seemed to utter, a brief prayer; and now, after standing for a few moments erect and still, bowed to the widow and left the chapel, eagerly followed by his son. A flash seemed to pass through Walther's mind; he forgot to pray, and stood trying to put his thoughts into some order, and distinguish between what was true and what were rumours and readily accepted fancies in the reports brought home of the finding of the dead man. It was with a fresh start that he felt his arm touched, and heard Hildemund whisper: "I pray you let me speak to you secretly. It touches *him*."

Walther was in a mood to expect strange revelations, and the boy's appeal no longer found him deaf. He signed to him to follow through a door leading to the private rooms of his lady, empty now, and sat down on a bench, for, stout-hearted as he was, his limbs trembled under him. "Speak, lad!" he said hoarsely; "what of my lord's death?"

"You guess it? You have marked the wound in his right temple? No boar tusk pierced it."

"Meinhold told me he had fallen on a sharp stone when struck for death," answered Walther, gazing at him.

"He fell on no stone that I wot of. He dropped in mid-stream when a felon spear flung by a traitor at a worse traitor's bidding struck him as he faced the boar at bay."

"Wert thou there?" demanded Walther, now fully roused and on the alert.

"I came too late. I could but drag him to the bank, reaching him from a rock in the stream. But I saw the two, master and man, hold counsel in the Donerwald, and the one rode after the pack, and the other made his way to the Eschthal, and lurked there."

"Who then beheld—?"

"Ulfric the leper, who dwells in a cave among the rocks. He bade me tell you all, and speedily."

"Oh, my good lord, so foully done to death! It was a true token," groaned the old seneschal. "And what to do?"

Mastering his emotion he questioned Hildemund closely as to every detail, trying to reconcile his story with the distorted account given by the huntsmen and men-at-arms, each of whom had his own tale to tell in the stir and emotion of the return. "This Ulfric. Who is he?" he asked.

"I know not," said Hildemund, perplexed how to convey his own confidence in one of that degraded and loathed band of outcasts; "but he is surely of gentle blood, and wise and kind, and unlike his fellows."

"How dost know so much of a leper?" asked Walther, in a tone of amazed disgust.

"At first by chance, and since because he has a strange spell which draws one to reverence and pity him. Surely he has some most sad history."

"A leper, and a boy! That we should have no other witnesses against a noble, and he the favourite of the Markgraf of Brandenburg!"

"It is a monstrous thing that because a felon-traitor is of noble birth his word should be worth more than that of an honest man low born!" exclaimed Hildemund.

"Boy! what folly is this? Wouldst turn the world upside down, and count a serf's word equal to a knight's perchance?" exclaimed Walther, scandalised amid all his grief and perplexity. "Yet for once I could almost wish it were so," he added reluctantly.

"And the little Burgfräulein?" suggested Hildemund.

"Alas! my little lady! the last rose [of Burg-

stein!" said the old retainer, in bitterness of spirit; "and the mother so weak and of such a feeble spirit, and so aghast with these ill tidings, that I fear the Graf will easily bend her to his will."

"Oh, sir, not if she knew the truth," Hildemund cried. "Do you mean that the Graf will seek to renew the betrothal? Give the child of the man murdered by his command to his son! It were too foul!"

"Seek it he will, doubtless, but that shall not be, though I have to slay him and his son to stay it. That I should have to live under one roof with them, and make no sign! I know not how I shall endure it. Yet must I wait and see how matters shape. I would there were any to take counsel with."

"Pfarrer Basil?" suggested Hildemund.

"I know nought of him. He has a golden tongue, they say, but it is not that we need. No, I may trust no stranger with so weighty a matter. But hearken, lad," he added, with a sudden recollection; "one thing I will look to. Thou wert near enough yesterday to hear what my lord said touching the banished Duke? Art man enough to take him a warning, and save the prince while baffling the Graf?"

"That am I!" cried Hildemund, joyfully.

"Then hearken. It seems the Duke has an enterprise on foot by which he thinks to win back his town of Stuttgart, and he must pass through the Hohlweg, five leagues hence, by noon to-morrow, from the convent where he will lie to-night. Canst thou reach the Hohlweg by dawn, ere the League set their ambush?"

"I can but try."

"Would I could give thee a horse, for the way is long, and thou hast been afoot since the morning, but I dare not. Thou must eat ere going forth, and go under cover of night, lest any mark it and suspicion arise."

"I would my mother knew I was safe," said Hildemund, a little anxiously.

"Tis pity she should be disquieted, but she would be the first to say she would suffer much to save a hunted man," said Walther, who knew Frau Magdalene well.

"But were it not well I had some pretext for my journey? What if I meet Kunz, and were stayed if I can give no reason for being there afoot? Should I not do well to go home and fetch my pack of books and bear them to the Annenkloster, for it must be there the Duke lies? The brethren there often buy of me."

"Well thought of, lad! Thou hast keen wits and canst use them, but I grudge the time. Now I will fetch food for thee; it is well that no prying eye will come hither, for I would not that any tongue wagged as to this conference. Ah, my dear lord, this at least shall be done to pleasure thee and baffle the man whose treachery compassed thy death. May the fiend give me the chance to repay that deed, and shame the master and meet his tool in fair fight, and may he keep out of my way till then!" muttered the old seneschal, his heart hot within him at the thought of living under one roof with his lord's assassins. He fetched food and drink, and bade Hildemund make the best meal he could, and fill his pack with provisions for his journey, and then left him to wait until it should be dark enough to pass the gates unobserved, except by the trusty men whom he meant to post there. He hurried back to his duties, fearing lest his absence should have been already noticed, but no one seemed to have observed it, and he was glad not to see Kunz anywhere. Kunz, in fact, had resolved not to venture into the castle until he had made himself safe by confession, and for that he had to wait until Pfarrer Basil returned for mass in the early morning, after his night of prayer beside the dead Freiherr. Walther was spared the

necessity of meeting him that evening, but he could not avoid meeting Kunz's master, nor the bitterness of having to receive orders from him. There was some change in his demeanour, in spite of his best efforts, which betrayed itself immediately to the keen perceptions of the Graf. "The man has heard something!" was his thought, and the next, "But from whom!" He kept him for some time while he gave directions, and asked one question and another arising out of the circumstances, ending with an inquiry as to who kept the gate that night.

"Meinhold and Ottheinrich, noble sir."

"Good. They are among the trustiest of the men-at-arms, doubtless. But stay, I bethink me—no word of what has befallen has been sent to Hohenfels? I know not how it has been overlooked; and the baron will take it ill if he be not summoned to the funeral to-morrow. Let Meinhold go thither, and lose no time."

"Meinhold, my lord?"

"Yes; he rides fast and well, and will be there sooner than any other of the men. My fellow Hans can take his place."

Nothing could have been more unwelcome, but the seneschal dared make no objection. His face

fell, do what he would, and he felt that the Graf saw it. He withdrew in silence, leaving Graf Lichtenberg to renewed disquiet. "How came a dead man to the bank?" he said to himself almost as uneasily as Kunz. Perhaps a shade of remorse mingled with his feelings; yet his main impression was that a great difficulty was removed from his way, a great future open before him, if only no one betrayed how it had come about. It was a time of violent deeds. Those very Brandenburgers, to whose great and rising fortunes he had attached himself, weary of the prolonged life and lavish extravagance of their old father, had seized him, masked and disguised, and imprisoned him as a madman in the strong castle of Plessenburg. Other deeds, wilder and wickedder still, were told of many a man who bore an ancient name, and stood high at the Imperial Court, or in the favour of archbishop or prince. Had this hot-headed Baron of Burgstein lived it had been fatal to the fortunes, perhaps cost the head, of von Lichtenberg. And yet he could not silence his disquietude. The risk was great; he was hardly important enough, of rank high enough, to pass on unharmed were the deed bruited abroad. Of Kunz's silence he was absolutely secure, but what if another had knowledge of what had befallen in the Eschthal? He could not hope to be

backed by Markgraf Kasimir, a man not unlike himself, though far more sagacious and crafty. The Markgraf did not love a dependent who got into trouble, and Lichtenberg was not indispensable to him, though on the way to become so. The old Roman custom that every great man should have his train of clients had reappeared in Germany throughout the Middle Ages. Not only every great noble, but every rich merchant had his clients, and the fast rising house of Brandenburg had a goodly following. Ruprecht of Lichtenberg was one of these. He had done the Markgraf good service; he hoped to do more yet. The moment was favourable, and he had run a great risk to seize it. This much at least was gained, that the helpless timid widow of his cousin had made no opposition to anything he had proposed, and yielded passively to his authority. He had no fear but that he should be able to send an ample remittance to Kasimir of Brandenburg, though he could not lend him the following of men whom he had hoped to take to the capture of the Duke of Wurtemberg. The burial was on the morrow, and all the men-at-arms and followers of Burgstein must be present, much more the nearest male relation. The Graf betook himself to his chamber, and wrote a letter for Kunz to carry the next day to the Markgraf,

explaining his absence and promising a subsidy which should amply atone for it.

It was night before Walther returned to Hildemund, who had found the time very long. He could hear by sounds in an adjoining chamber that the Freifrau had been persuaded to leave the chapel, and that Barbara was attending on her and the little Rosilde, but no one entered the small room where the seneschal had taken him. The moon came out and flooded the castle court with light, but only a few of its rays could penetrate through the narrow window and glitter on the oak floor, making the polished surface like a shining pool, and the figures on the Flemish tapestry over the doorway weird and magnified. The stir and hum about the castle grew less and less, though figures still came and went, to and from the kitchen or stables, or the chapel, where preparations were being made for the morrow's funeral. Other sounds, unnoticed by day, grew audible; Hildemund noted each as the long minutes passed by. He could hear the horses in the stables stamping and moving restlessly; the dull splash as a bucket, lowered into the deep well, struck the water; the bark of a dog, the clank of its chain as it pulled against it in its kennel; footsteps crossing the yard and pausing; some interchanges of words; the creaking of the

drawbridge as it was raised for the night; the last clink and clang from the forge, where not only was armour repaired and altered, but all vessels of iron, all chains and bolts which needed repair, from a cauldron to the lock of a strong box, were carried; but these now ceased. The day's work was over. Next he heard the shrill squeak of the larger bats, sweeping backwards and forwards in chase of moths; the owls hooted, and one flitted soundlessly by the window, so close that he could see the soft white wings and great eyes. Still Walther came not, though priceless time was passing. At last he stood in the doorway, an unlighted lamp in his hand.

"Lad," he said in a low voice, for only the tapestry divided the anteroom from the Freifrau's chamber, "this Graf surely hath a familiar spirit which whispers secrets in his ear, like that Count of Foix whom old chronicles tell of. Why else should he bethink himself to post one of his own men at the gate to-night, so that none can go out or in but he can hear thereof?"

"Has he so?" said Hildemund, startled; "he has guessed somewhat, it would seem. Then there is no leaving the castle by the gate."

"How else wouldst thou leave it?" asked the

seneschal, with a sharp, inquiring look at the boy, who looked down and coloured.

"Be not displeased, Master Walther; it may serve us in good stead at this pinch, though I should not dare to tell you of such a prank otherwise, but once I did leave the castle by the little old postern. There is a plank gone, and I clambered round to where the rock is something less steep, and reached the old gnarled oak which grows out of the cliff, and so down."

"If my lord knew of this prank," began Walther, indignantly, but stopped short with a pang of recollection. "Alas, what am I saying? So thou didst climb down the cliff, malapert? By St. Eustace"—Walther had caught his lord's favourite oath, and swore on all solemn occasions by the patron saint of hunting and of Burgstein—"it was a brave deed, though a foolhardy. True it is that once there was a narrow ledge all around the walls, whereby they might be visited if need were, though I knew not that a goat could climb down thence, but it is long since anyone adventured along that dizzy path, and the old postern may well have gone to decay. It must be looked to. I may not let thee risk thy life thus to-night; the moonlight is deceitful, and a slip full easy. No; I must entrust thee with a secret

known but to my lord and me, for only the lord of the castle and his seneschal hold this knowledge in each generation."

Walther went to the window and looked out. The surrounding walls stood high and dark, and shadows lurked in the corners, but the keep rose up high into the night sky, where floated a few white clouds, reflecting the moonbeams which flooded its eyeless face with ivory light. A fainter, earthlier yellow ray came from the chapel windows, and messengers came and went from its door across the court to fetch the black cloth with which it was to be hung, or make other preparations for the morrow.

"Stephen is there, and Hansjörg; they would stay thee. It were safer to go through the hall. I will go first. The men have had much to do, and cannot yet get to their beds, so I have ordered them an extra meal. I warrant they will not heed thee. Take this platter and cup as though to wait on them. Go boldly through, and by the little passage leading to the stair in the wall which takes you to the lower hall of the donjon. Dost understand?"

Hildemund obeyed with the ready apprehension which never deserted him. Walther preceded him

into the hall, where a party of retainers were supping and talking over the morning's calamity and its probable results, but all had evidently accepted the belief that the Freiherr had been struck with apoplexy. They spoke in voices less loud than usual, and song and jest were absent, for all felt that there would now be a rule in the castle very unlike that of their jovial, good-humoured, hot-headed master.

"All the pitchers empty, men?" said Walther, stopping by the end of the table where they were gathered.

"Here, Friedel, bestir thyself, and fetch another stoup."

"I go, sir, I go," answered Hildemund, and disappeared with great alacrity just as the Graf entered from the upper end of the hall, and asked if Kunz had come yet.

All the voices had dropped at once into silence at the first sound of his voice.

"He told Jacob Schreihuhn, who came with Junker Wolfgang, that he would be here early to-morrow, noble sir," answered one of the men.

"So! Let me know as soon as he comes; I have an errand for him; and see that a swift horse be ready." The Graf had caught a glimpse of Hilde-

mund, and although the light was dim and uncertain he felt a vague suspicion that some one not of the household had been in the hall. "Who was yonder boy who went out but now?"

The men, who had paid no attention to the boy whom Walther had addressed, looked perplexed.

"Do you mean Heinrich, the cook's boy, noble sir, or Jörg, or Friedel? They were all here just now."

"My lord means Friedel, the seneschal sent him for another wine stoup," said another.

"The knave tarries long. I will send Jörg, if I see him. You have no commands for me, my lord?" said Walther.

The Graf shook his head, and Walther retired. A lad presently appeared with wine, and no suspicion was aroused among the men. The Graf looked at him keenly, but he was something of the same height and colouring as Hildemund, and his suspicions were allayed. He felt much security in the certainty that no one would leave the castle unmarked by his spy, who perfectly understood why he was to share Heinrich's watch instead of Meinhold, though he did not trouble himself as to his master's reasons. The dependents of Graf Lichtenberg were too well disciplined to inquire into their

lord's motives for anything he chose to do. They knew it was an offence which he never overlooked, and they knew, too, that he could reward amply and punish terribly.

CHAPTER VII.

With all the speed he could make Hildemund found his way to the large square hall of the keep, a huge, dreary place never used or inhabited. Walther soon joined him and sought by the moonlight for a part of the wall where under the pressure of his hand a stone turned revealing a narrow opening. A cold wind blew through it; all was pitch darkness within. Walther struck fire with a flint and steel which he had brought and kindled the lamp, which he gave to Hildemund; the little pale flame flickered in the draughty air, and seemed as if it could hardly contend with the thick darkness pressing upon it.

"Your word that you will never betray nor use this secret save in the service of our little lady and mistress," he said. "I never thought to tell it to living soul, but what can one do? I must not tarry; but heed what I have to say. You will have to go down many steps and then along a passage; presently you will hear water, and be wary then how you walk, for there is but a narrow way above the

stream, and the passage thenceforward has been more hollowed by the water than made by man. Some cunning builder used it to serve his turn. It is the Pöllatwasser which flows down there, and if you follow it you will come to the opening where it pours out and leaps into the valley below."

"Why, I have been a dozen times among the rocks where the water-leap is, and never guessed anyone could enter the cavern!" exclaimed the boy in astonished vexation. Walther smiled grimly.

"There be yet some secrets about the castle you have not found out, young master," he said, "but seek not to return this way, for you could not open the door. Make all the speed you may, and God be with you, my boy. I would I had any token to send the Duke, but he should know an honest face when he sees it, if 'tis only for its rarity!"

"But how shall I tell you how I sped?"

"For that you must wait until I can go to your house. Farewell, dear lad."

He drew back, and the stone closed behind him. Hildemund could not even hear his footsteps. Guarding the flame of his lamp he went down the steps further and further into the darkness. The light shone for a moment on either side of the narrow way as he passed along, glittering on the damp and shining walls of rock. Not a sound broke

the intense silence, except the occasional fall of heavy drops of water from the rocky roof and his own footsteps; the air became thick and heavy, and the darkness was so dense that it seemed a solid thing around him; he felt as if he were going down into the very heart of the earth. He could not calculate time or distance in this blank, black solitude. All at once a sound seemed to fill his ears and startle him inexpressibly; then he knew it was the hurried beating of his own heart, and that he was afraid. He had been on far more perilous adventures before now, when a false step or a moment's heedlessness had been death, and here, as far as he knew, was absolutely no danger at all; but then he had been in the free open air, with the sky above him, and familiar sights and sounds all about, and he had felt only exhilarated by the sense of danger. Here he seemed cut off from all the living, with nothing between him and the spirit world, and his heart failed him. He stood still and rallied his spirits, crossed himself, and repeated a short, fervent prayer that he might not disgrace himself by being a coward, and went on again. The way was always downward, and no sign of any end. His lamp began to flicker and send up uncertain vivid flashes; it would not burn much longer. What if it went out and left him in this total darkness, this utter silence?

But the silence was no longer so unbroken. He began to distinguish the ripple and flow of water, and his heart leapt as if he were already out of his prison. This must be the brook called the Pöllatwasser, which flowing from the high land behind the Burgstein made its way underground for a considerable distance and emerged by this passage to fall in a silver cascade of much more height than volume, and join the river in the valley below. Although, seen from the village both the Rossberg and the Burgstein looked like isolated rocks, the latter formed part of the rocky ground lying behind it, at a lower level indeed, so that the cliff on which the castle stood rose solitary and inaccessible on all sides. There were many springs and streams in this district, which found their way on either side of the watershed, and the Pöllatwasser was one. It was well that Hildemund's lamp burned for some minutes longer, even though with intermittent and ominous flashes, for he could see the narrow ledge above the water now flowing beside him, and when the light suddenly went out and he had to make his way by feeling the rocky wall with its vault hardly above his head, he was no longer oppressed by the soundless solitude, for the stream was an old friend, and its voice called him to follow to the fair world of light and air whither it was going. Pre-

sently a faint glimmer of daylight lessened the darkness and gradually turned it into duskiness, though until close to the opening among the broken tumbled rocks and brushwood half-way down the Burgstein no clear light was visible. How to emerge, however, Hildemund could not guess. The mouth of the cave was entirely occupied by the stream, which leaped down, a true "wild wasser," and shattered itself into spray and foam as it fell. But presently he discovered three or four steps leading up to a hole in the rock overhead, by which he emerged, and found himself close to the path leading down to the village, with the castle far overhead and the valley yet far below, and the moonlight silvering the stream flowing through it and massing the woods into blackness. Hildemund's heart exulted in the sense of peril past and the return to the upper world as he looked around, and forgot the sense of weariness which had grown very oppressive as he made his way through the subterranean passage. He felt as if he had somehow conquered all this lovely, moonlit world to which he had come back again. But there was no time to linger; he could not tell how much had been spent in his slow progress, and all his journey was yet before him. Before he could start on his mission he must descend the long path to the valley, and thence make his

way to his home. And by the time he had done this he was dismayed to feel how hard it was to drag his limbs along. He had been on foot more or less since the dawn, and the day had been one of keen and varied emotions. "How shall I ever reach Sanct Anna by morning?" was his thought as he opened the house door. His mother sat reading; she looked pale and anxious, as he saw immediately. "Do not blame me, mother dear! there was no help for this delay," he said, grieved and eager.

"I wait to blame until I know there is cause, my son," she answered with her gentle gravity. "What has befallen?"

No rumour had reached the lonely dwelling of the day's doings. More than one peasant woman or child had come to consult Frau Magdalene about some case of sickness, but they had heard nothing concerning Burgstein. Hildemund was the first to tell the tale, which he did without holding anything back. Frau Magdalene was mute with horror.

"The little child!" she said at last. "In such godless hands!"

She said no more. Emotion did not readily pass with her into speech, but Hildemund knew how profoundly moved she was. Amid her horror and pity, too, there was a great thrill of fear for her boy, but she gave it no words, and when he

roused himself to prepare his pack of books she began to help him, only saying tenderly, "My tired lad! I would thou couldst rather go to thy bed!"

"So do I, mother dear," said Hildemund ruefully, but bracing himself manfully to get ready for his journey. "If only I get speech of the Duke! What if they will not let me come nigh him?"

"Hast thou nothing choice among thy books to show him? Thou must even use thy best wits when the time comes; but if it may be, betray to none that thou hast a secret message for him. Who knows what traitors there may be amongst his followers, or even among the brethren of the cloister?"

"True, mother, I had not thought about that. Be not troubled about me; the thing has to be done, and I'm glad it falls to me."

He smiled the sweet, brave smile which he had inherited from his father, and which had won the young heart of Magdalene for Kilian Dahn. The boy was a true Thuringian, sharing both in the Southern and Northern German nature, with the joyous delight in life characterising the South, and all its freshness and simplicity, yet dashed with the sober reserve and sturdiness of the North. Although he hourly recalled his father to Magdalene, who loved him doubly for being thus as it were both himself and Kilian, yet he had an equally strong

resemblance to her. "A delightful boy," Pfarrer Basil had inwardly called him; and truly all his life he had been the delight of his mother's heart.

"How weary he is," she said to herself, as she looked after him. "I scarce know his step, and the Annenkloster so far, and dangers many. God guide and keep my boy, and save the poor Duke. The dear Lord knows 'tis the only son of his mother, and she a widow." And she lifted a wistful appealing look to the night sky, and went indoors again, and prayed not only for her son, but for those who had done the dark deed in the Eschthal, and those who would suffer from it.

Hildemund stepped out with sturdy resolution by narrow tracks made by woodcutters, or charcoal-burners, or foresters. He had a short boar spear in his hand, for wolves would be abroad at that time, and the forest was unsafe. The wind bent the tree tops, and rustled the branches, or came up with a great surge over the pines. Owls hooted to one another; a rustle in the furze sometimes told that a wild animal was moving there. Once the eyes of a wild cat like great yellow topazes looked down on Hildemund from a branch over his head, along which the creature lay flat, waving its tufted tail over him, but he had been out before now at night in the woods, and knew its ways. An hour later he

passed a hut for the first time; it was Kaspar's, and he saw him standing at the door, with a horse tied near.

"So! Good morrow, or good night, Kaspar!" he cried. "What horse have you there?"

"One that strayed by just now. I caught it, and now I watch it lest the wolves should make a meal of it."

Hildemund looked eagerly at it.

"Hark you, Kaspar, this beast belongs to Lichtenberg. You might get a broad piece by taking it home—and yet no, I know not—it were safer mayhap to have nought to do with it."

"I take not a stiver from that hand," said Kaspar, fiercely. This von Lichtenberg has ever been the cruellest master to his serfs; he was knee deep in the blood of the peasants when poor Conrad and the rest were slaughtered in Württemberg twelve years ago. Lutheran or Papist is all one to him, but let a man bethink him that he is a man, rack, and cord, and gibbet, and red-hot tongs are his portion. And now he hopes to be master here!"

"It is no time to talk of such matters," said Hildemund. "What then will you do with the beast? Listen," and a smile of mischievous amusement flashed over his countenance; "lend it to me to ride

to Sanct Anna; I am bound to be there early, and I am heartily tired."

"Take it," answered Kaspar, briefly.

"I would you would let me give you somewhat for the loan," said Hildemund, who knew well how dire were the straits to which the wretched household were often reduced.

"Do, an thou wilt; I will gladly take it from thee," said Kaspar, with sudden eagerness. "I need money sorely."

"Is aught amiss?—Your father?" asked Hildemund, struck with something unusual about the man's face and voice.

"He needs nought. I found him dead when I came home but now."

"Alone! without a priest?"

"Aye, even so."

"The poor old man!"

"Pity him if you will for having lived, not for having died. Methinks his soul needs no masses; he has had his share of Purgatory," said Kaspar, abruptly, and withdrew into his hut. Hildemund thought he understood now his eagerness for the money. He would need it to pay the dead-tax ere the old man could be buried. "Poor old man!" he repeated to himself as he rode off. It would be necessary to take a longer way, for, where a boy

might go a horse could not, but that mattered little; he should easily reach the Hohlweg before the ambush was laid, and Sanct Anna before the Duke was astir. Even if the League had already seized the pass, there would be small risk of a solitary traveller being stopped, he hoped, both for the Duke's sake and his own, for he by no means desired that his pack should be overhauled, since under less dangerous wares were several of Luther's last broadsheets and pamphlets for the prior of Sanct Anna. The abbot troubled himself little about controversy, but the prior and several of the brethren were strongly on the side of reform.

To ride Graf von Lichtenberg's horse in order to baffle his schemes filled Hildemund's heart with delight. He laughed for pure enjoyment. Night was nearly gone. There was a stir in the leaves as if the trees were awakening; the sky grew pale in the east, and the dusky earth and pale horizon seemed to blend together. A blackbird awoke, and sang for a moment, taking up his song just where he had left it the evening before, when, perched aloft, he had trilled with all his might, as if he had to tell a tale which must be finished before night-fall. As he had been the last songster to make his notes heard, so now he was the first to uplift them; but he ceased almost directly. A roe deer trotted

by, brushing the heavy dew off the ferns, and carrying a bit of honey-suckle in its mouth which it had nipped at the edge of the glade. The wood pigeons awoke and cooed, and the blackbird broke again into louder and more continued song. Dawn grew rosy in the east, while in the western sky the moon had almost gone down. Then a saffron glow spread far up the sky, precursor of the sun himself, and the world seemed all at once to awake and fill with life and sound.

By this time Hildemund could see from the high ground the cloister of Sanct Anna in a broad valley below, and the more distant houses of Schwanstadt, a town where he had often been. Blue mists lay thick in the vale, and the ground was all wet with night dew. The first glow of full daylight was appearing as Hildemund rode into the narrow ravine known as the Hollow Way. He could not but think what a well chosen place for an ambush it was, for while a small body of men could easily bar either end, a large one could command it overhead, concealed from view and in perfect safety among the rocks and brushwood.

"What traitors the Duke must have about him to tell the very day and hour of his passing here, and to plan so surely for his destruction!" Hildemund was thinking, as he glanced around. Just

then a stone fell from above, dislodged perhaps by its own weight, but his heart gave a leap, and he urged his horse on, almost sure that he caught the gleam of a steel cap among the bushes overhead. If it were so, those lying in wait thought it best to let him pass, and he found himself in the broad green valley unmolested. To ride up to the monastery and excite wonder and comment by such an unusual mode of arrival was not to be thought of, and a mile from the gates he turned his horse loose by a clear wimpling stream, which was on its way to join the Neckar, and walked on, too full of hope and expectation to feel weary.

The cloister of Sanct Anna was a veritable fortress, though built for men of peace; no one at that time felt safe beyond walls and moats; but the scene around was one of plenty and prosperity. Vineyards, whose sunny wine filled the abbot's cellars, covered a gentle slope near the convent; cattle dotted the broad meadows; corn, gathered ready for the barn, stood golden in the fields, or had been already carried into the granges, and labourers were hastening to their work of storing it away, or were milking the cows, or ploughing with the heavy primitive implement which took two men to guide it and a stout ox to drag it through the deep furrows of the rich soil. There was not wanting, however, a

dark shadow on the fair scene: the gallows stood near the monastery, with its clanking chains and more than one dead body. Death was inflicted for many crimes besides murder, and executioners had their hands full in those days. The abbey prison was rarely empty; there were prisoners under accusation, and prisoners condemned, and debtors to the abbot constantly occupying it. Such an establishment as this was a little kingdom, ruling its possessions and its dependents at its will, with ample revenues and rights over fish and game, tax and toll, while its own lands provided flax and corn, fruits, wine, and food in abundance. If the abbot were an ambitious man, his hand would be felt in political matters far beyond his immediate neighbourhood; he would probably leave his cloister a good deal to the prior, and live at the court of his bishop, who would be a great secular prince as well as a spiritual potentate, and fill some second office there. Such had been Abbot Willibald, the last head of Sanct Anna, and some of the monks found great fault with their actual ruler for his indifference to worldly gain or splendour, and the sums he spent on beautifying his church and increasing the convent library, and importing plants and flowers hitherto unknown in Germany for his private garden. Abbot Willibald, when at Sanct Anna, had filled it with

splendid guests, and entertained them royally; but Abbot Johannes would let months pass without inviting anyone to pass the gates except architects from Milan, painters from Cologne or Nuremberg, or messengers bringing him books and roots from Augsburg and Basel, Leipzig and Hamburg. Latin and German books were growing more and more numerous, though Greek ones were still very rare; and long before Luther's time a flood of broad-sheets and works fulminating against the Papacy and clergy, and demanding reform, and separation between Church and State had abounded, notwithstanding the bull of Leo X. ordering confiscation of all unauthorised works, and a fine of ducats, full weight, with excommunication of seller and buyer; and it was not in convents that these were least read. Hildemund knew he and his pack were secure of a welcome from more than the prior, though certain of the brethren were carefully excluded from all knowledge of the transaction. The new doctrine was stirring Sanct Anna, and waking up strife and dissension there as elsewhere.

The great gateway rose before him, flanked by two strong towers. There was always a body of men-at-arms to garrison the abbey, which, standing alone as it did, had to defend itself and the peasants who fled into it at any time of danger with their

household stuff. Civil war, feuds with neighbouring barons or with the town of Schwanstadt, ever jealous of the claims of Sanct Anna, alternately menaced the brotherhood, with but short intervals of tranquillity. The gateway itself sufficiently told the same warlike existence of the brotherhood, for it was loopholed, with an embattled parapet above it, a drawbridge, and two ponderous doors. Between the two centre parapets was a stone figure, with a mitre and a pastoral staff. The building was a long quadrangle, with the church at one end, surrounded by a deep moat and wall, with an unusually high rampart. Hildemund stood for a moment considering. He wished he could divine where the Duke might be. If he had brought many attendants no doubt they were lodged in the hospitium for inferior guests, a building of stone, plaster, and timber, apart from the main edifice, cared for by the cellarer or hospitaller, or some other officer, but Ulrich would certainly be in the abbot's own house, and how to get speech of him? It could not be hoped that the abbot would condescend to summon Hildemund to his presence while occupied with his princely guest, to whom he would be showing the library, or his private garden, of which he was equally proud; or else he would be in secret consultation over plans to recover the duchy from which the Duke had been

expelled five years before by force and fraud combined. The abbot had been deeply indebted to Ulrich's grandfather, the noble Eberhard with the Beard, and now showed his gratitude by befriending the fugitive descendant of his benefactor at some considerable risk, for not only was the formidable union of nobles and free cities, known as the Swabian League, the inveterate foe of Ulrich, and in possession of his duchy, but Austria coveted it, and Brandenburg was ever ready to aid the imperial schemes. It could not be hoped that Ulrich's visit to Sanct Anna could be kept a secret, and if his present schemes failed the abbot who had received him and lent him money would suffer too. Hildemund guessed a little of this, and he saw that the sudden blow which the Duke had hoped to strike was no secret to his enemies, who were ready to turn this project to Ulrich's own destruction. It was urgent to warn him, but he must trust to good fortune to find an opportunity. He went up to the gate. The watchman was standing above it, at the little door of his cell which was over the gateway. He recognised Hildemund and nodded to him, and the porter saw him almost as soon, and gave him a cordial greeting. Hildemund had the fairy gift of winning a smile and a welcome wherever he went.

"You will scarce see my lord abbot," said the

porter; "he hath for once other things in his mind than books and roots."

"Why, what is toward?" asked Hildemund, shifting his pack, and hoping to gain some useful intelligence.

"We have guests, lad! Aye, you will scarcely believe it. It minds me of the good old times of our late abbot. Then indeed there was a goodly stir, a coming and going that ended not; it was a pleasure to be porter then. Now most times I might slumber as I were one of the Seven Sleepers, and none would call me to open the gate."

"And who may be here?"

"The Duke of Württemberg, no less! A prince, every inch of him, whatever his foes may say. A wild one an you will, but would you have a prince live like a hermit?"

"And what brings him here?"

"Nay, that I know not; I am not in my lord abbot's secrets, and scarce is it safe for him thus to venture into his duchy, all garrisoned by his enemies; but we are all for Württemberg here, not one of us *bündisch*, unless it be Brother Otto, who has his family in Reutlingen. I would not trust him."

"Aye, it was the chastisement the Duke gave

Reutlingen for slaying his forester that first brought the vengeance of the League on him."

"Even so; and a sore vengeance it has been. Pass on, my son; there comes the precentor, and he signs to thee."

Hildemund went onward into the great quadrangle, along which ran the ambulatory, with its penthouse roof supported on numerous columns, with the dormitory above it on one side, faced by the refectory on the other. At the eastern end was the stately church, with the chapter house on the north of it. At one corner was the stair leading to the dormitory, at another that which led to the refectory, a noble hall with its small kitchen behind it. There was a much larger kitchen on the ground floor, and an inner court with other buildings round it, all enclosed within the high and massive walls, below which ran the wide moat.

As the porter had said, the precentor had caught sight of Hildemund, and was beckoning to him. Hildemund went up to him and made his greeting with due reverence.

"Hast brought us another chorale or song as sweet as those last?" asked the precentor; "the Duke, who is now with us, was mightily pleased with those we had from thee in the spring. He would fain know who it is who makes these lays, which it

seems are sung at market and camp and in court and ladies' bower. What hast thou brought me?"

"I fear me nought that befits this holy place, father. I have nought but a love song," said Hildemund, with an arch twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, well, we are not so lightly moved as to be endangered by thy song," said the precentor, good humouredly. "Let me hear it and judge thereof. Thou hast a pretty, lark-like pipe, though not over strong. Begin, my son."

And Hildemund put down his pack and obeyed, smiling, but throwing into the simple words a feeling which made them infinitely touching.

Ach! wie herbe ist das Scheiden,
Wenn nun Einer geht von Beiden,
Die sich treu geliebt!
Als wir von einander gingen,
Uns zum letztenmal umfingen,
Weinten wir all zwei,
Blickten still uns in die Augen,
Liessen stille Thränen saugen
Von der Wangen Schnee;
Als wir von einander gingen,
Uns zum letztenmal umfingen,
Unterm Eichbaum grün.
Oftmals pflegt' ich dir's zu sagen:
Liebe muss am Leiden klagen,
Kennt kein bleibend Glück.
Wann ich in den Wald werd' gehen,
Und die grünen Wipfel sehen,
Wein' ich mich zu Tod.

"I know not wherein lies the spell of these silly songs," said the precentor, who had had to wipe his eyes, which he did quite simply and openly, not at all ashamed that they were wet. "My lord, pardon me; I knew not that you and his highness were here," he added, hastily, and in some confusion, as the voice of his superior reached him, and he saw Abbot Johannes with his guest, advancing from the passage leading to the abbot's house.

"A sweet ditty, and sweetly sung," said the Duke. "Come hither, boy."

Hildemund's heart beat high as he advanced and lifted a glance to the man of whom such wild tales were told; who had been a child ruler, an exiled man, the victim of his own violent temper and of powerful and embittered enemies. As the porter had said, although his countenance bore traces of suffering and violent passions, and a deep melancholy sat upon it, Ulrich of Württemberg was every inch a prince. The contrast between his stately bearing and martial air, and the round, well-nourished face and figure of Abbot Johannes provoked a smile.

"Whence hast thou these songs, my fair boy?" he asked, in a manner irresistibly sweet and gracious. "It would seem they are all framed by one cunning singer, and go where one will one hears them, now

grave, now gay, but ever lovely. The very air is full of them. Who is the happy singer on whom this gift is bestowed of heaven?"

"I may not say, my noble lord."

"How! what hinders?" asked the Duke, with the sudden darkening of countenance called up at once by any opposition; and Hildemund felt how stormy and formidable his displeasure must be.

"I have passed my word to tell no man his name, good my lord."

"Pshaw! a prince's desires should override such a promise; or has the command of a banished lord no weight?"

"Ah, double, treble, my dear lord; but yet——"

"Yet what?" asked Ulrich, his face clearing at once at the warm and eager outcry whose sincerity was unmistakable. "I am none of the richest, as my lord abbot here knows," he added, with a smile and glance at the abbot, who raised his hands and eyes with a gesture of rueful assent; "but I will give thee ten gold pieces if thou wilt tell me the name of this unknown Meistersänger."

"My noble lord, can your highness think I will do so for gold if I will not to please you?" said Hildemund, deeply mortified.

"I have found gold would win most things," said Ulrich, with a mirthless laugh. "Gold lost me

Würtemberg five years ago, for the League had the longer purse, and my Swiss melted away like their own snow when the Föhn blows, and many a noble followed. So thou wilt not tell me?"

"Noble sir, the man who makes these lays which all are singing is so unhappy that I think few ever had so cruel a fate. Gentle he is of breeding, yet an outcast for no fault of his, and most friendless except for me and my mother, and I *could* not fail the trust he puts in me, my lord. He is poor enough already."

"Enough! I ask thee no more: Poor! nay, what man is poor that owns a faithful friend? I call this man rich, boy. Yet truly I should know how to feel for him if his life be what thou sayst."

He paused in dark and troubled thought, and the abbot, who had been on thorns to put the question, eagerly asked Hildemund if he had brought him aught new or rare. All his anxiety about the upshot of the Duke's visit was forgotten in this momentous inquiry. Hildemund began to open his pack, and the abbot's little grey eyes sparkled greedily. "What! what!" he exclaimed, stammering with excitement, "a new Vergilius from the press of Aldus Manutius! On parchment too, and the type so fair and clear as I yet never beheld! It would seem that though we have lost Master Manuzi him-

self, his worthy father-in-law continues his labours excellently well, and it is said that his son Paolo hath the same learned and discriminating taste as Aldus himself. But art sure this is no counterfeit from Lyons or Florence?" he asked, with a spasm of alarm; "let me see the Aldine mark, my son."

He peered with deep anxiety at the title page and examined it long and minutely. Then his face relaxed; he heaved a sigh of relief, and looked at the volume tenderly. "Yes, it is genuine, certainly genuine. See, prior, saw you ever a more beauteous work? It may yet be that our library will equal that of Abbot Trithemius, with its two thousand volumes. A learned man and a crafty—Abbot Trithemius. Many a precious manuscript which otherwise had found its way hither hath he secured by gold and subtlety for Spanheim, but Heaven has taken his soul unto itself. May it have peace!" said the abbot, piously crossing himself, and doubtless feeling there was a consoling side to this loss; "and other people have now a chance of getting rare and valuable books and manuscripts."

"You have not yet seen this work, my lord," said Hildemund.

"How! Mary and Joseph! the *Annales* of Tacitus! Thou art a good boy, a good boy, and shalt find thy profit in serving me. This is a white day,

and must be celebrated in the convent. See to it, cellarer."

"Will it please you to look at these Hours of the Blessed Mary, my lord?"

"Well, we will have it for the library; it is but fit we should," said the abbot, with much less enthusiasm, "though I would that Aldus would occupy himself rather with the works of the ancients. My lord, will you allow me to leave you for an instant? I would fain compare these Annales with the copy which I already possess. I am with you again in a moment."

"Nay, hurry not, my good father," said Ulrich, a smile crossing his face as he looked at the portly little figure, which told a tale of habitual good living, and a peaceful, sedentary life. "It is yet full early. I will look through this fair youth's stores while you are thus worthily employed. What have you that an unlettered man may buy, my boy?"

"Your highness is pleased to jest," said Hildemund, his mind full of the question how to introduce his warning, with the prior and one or two of the knights in Ulrich's following standing so near. "This is the story of Sodonca, Queen of Pritania, and this tells how Knight Pontus was seven times led to gallows tree."

"On my faith I know not whether to esteem

him most lucky or ill-fated! And this is the Rose Garden?"

"Yes, my lord, but not the old tale—this is but a herbal, dealing also with horoscopes and palmistry. And this is the legend of Adam and Eve, and tells how Adam was set in Paradise to create good and useful animals by striking the river Euphrates with his rod, but Eve must needs do the same, and every time she struck the stream a noxious and evil one leaped forth."

"Aye, 'twas ever so; whenever a woman meddles, 'tis to mar," said Ulrich, with the same hard laugh as before, and the prior interchanged a look with the knights standing by, well aware that he was thinking of his wife, Sabina of Bavaria, his worst enemy.

"And this is a little book of fables from the Latin of Babrius and others," continued Hildemund.

"Canst read it?" asked the Duke, who seemed to have taken a fancy to the boy, much as Pfarrer Basil had done.

"Yes, my lord."

"Let me hear. We will hold our school and rival the one yonder," said the Duke, looking to the other end of the quadrangle, where a monk was teaching the children sent from the abbey lands to be instructed, the elder repeating a catechism

orally taught, the younger learning the alphabet on glazed tiles instead of a book.

Hildemund flushed suddenly as a new idea occurred to him. His mother had passed on her knowledge of Latin to him, and he began fluently enough.

"The beasts, my lord, had rebelled against their king, the lion, and driven him from his realm, but then the fear came upon them that he might yet return," he read.

"Ha!" said the Duke, with a smile and glance at his companions.

"Wherefore," resumed Hildemund, "they took counsel what to do, and the lynx stood forth and said——"

"Vulpes, my boy—a fox. My learning suffices for that much."

"Methinks here it should be rendered a lynx, my lord."

"I tell thee, boy— Well, what befell?" said Ulrich, checking himself, as he caught the swift and meaning look which Hildemund raised to him. "What then?"

"If I read it right, my liege, this lynx, as I deem it is, counselled them to lie in wait for the noble lion in a narrow way, whereby they had learned he was minded to go, and there seek to

seize and lead him captive, unless indeed they rather slew him," said Hildemund, drawing his finger along the lines, as if to challenge the Duke's criticism of his version, not one word of which was justified by the original.

"And did they so?"

"No, your highness; a humble little hare came and warned the royal beast, and he went not by the Hollow Way."

"He did well," said Ulrich, instantly catching the allusion to the name of the ravine, "but how learned the hare of this treachery?"

"The fable says not that, my lord, but hares have long ears."

"It were well if they always used them in the service of their liege lords." He turned away, still looking at the little volume. "It is strange how many of the brutes prance on the crest of some proud noble," he added, smiling. "My lord of Eberstein, you do the wild boar honour, and you, Florian, have the king of beasts himself. The Aarbergs own the wolf, and methinks I have seen a hound and a lynx in noble bearings."

"Yes, my lord, my own family have a hound," said the prior.

"And the lynx belongs to Lichtenberg," added one of the gentlemen in Ulrich's train.

"Ha!" said Ulrich, and a dark flush mounted to his brow, "I had forgotten. Graf Lichtenberg! a plotter who is hand and glove with the League and the Truchsess. Who knows where he is now?"

"At Burgstein, whence I come, your highness," said Hildemund.

"So! Aye, the Freiherr is his kinsman—he has lands in Württemberg. A rough, honest churl, as I have ever held, hating the League even as I do," said the Duke with a laugh, "holding it a burgher-like thing for knights to join with citizens and merchants against noble blood. You know him, Eberstein?"

"Little indeed, my lord; he has ever lived on his Burgstein lands, but he is the kind of man your highness describes."

"Not one to mingle in plots, then?"

"My lord, he is dead," said Hildemund, involuntarily dropping his voice. "He died yesterday—suddenly."

"How! and who is heir to his lands?" asked the Duke, eagerly. "Hath he a son?"

"Only a daughter, noble sir, a little child, and after her the Graf of Lichtenberg."

"Is it so?" said Ulrich, and fell into deep thought, whence he was aroused by the return of the abbot, purple with haste and excitement.

"My lord," he began, breathless, "if your highness has but a moment, it were well spent on comparing the Tacitus which this good boy has brought me with the one but last week sent me by the learned Philip Welser of Ulm, enriched by manuscript notes from his own hand. Ah, my lord, the more we contemplate Tacitus, the more divine doth his genius appear; nay, the very collocation of his words has a strength and force unknown to other authors."

The gentlemen in Ulrich's following looked at each other in consternation. "My lord, every hour is precious; we are yet far from Waldau, where alone we may safely spend the night," said Graf Eberstein.

"True, my lord abbot; I fear that the pleasure you offer me must be for another time, the more that I would speak to you once more of my matters. Gentlemen, I will not keep you long waiting," said Ulrich, turning towards the passage leading to the abbot's house, but looking back to say: "Tarry my return, fair boy. I like your little book, and will buy it."

Abbot Johannes had no choice but to follow, which he did, looking very rueful, and as if his heart led him so strongly back to the convent

library that his limbs could hardly move in this contrary direction.

The delay was quite as unwelcome to those left behind. Ulrich's friends were well aware how great a risk he ran in having left Hohentwiel at all, and that all hope of success in his enterprise depended on swift action, were astonished and perplexed by this loss of time, and the prior was longing for a quiet moment in which to examine and secure the books and pamphlets which he had commissioned Hildemund to procure for him. The precentor wanted to note down the air which had taken his fancy, and sundry novices and brethren were looking forward to hearing something of the outside world from him. There was no very strict discipline at Sanct Anna, unless a monotonous life could be called so, and no such devotion as uplifted those who had renounced the world into a region above it. Even to Prior Lucas religious questions were more a matter of intellect than heart or soul, and the abbot himself had a touch of paganism in him, like numerous other learned men of the time; though in Germany the spirit of the age tended towards moral reform, while in Italy its tendency was towards a new birth of art and science consistent with deep corruption.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE many minutes had passed a brother came to summon Hildemund to the abbot's presence. Those left behind looked at each other questioningly, and the knights who had attended Ulrich showed uneasy displeasure.

"This delay will be fatal," said Graf Eberstein, with deep vexation. "Surely the Duke is beside himself thus to linger. It will be high noon ere we are on our way, and if once the rumour get abroad that he is without the walls of Hohentwiel, a hundred enemies will be afoot, and all hope of striking a sudden blow lost once more. You will scarce see your fair betrothed this time, Junker Florian."

Both lords were among the faithful few who had clung to Ulrich through his misfortunes, and the lands of both had been seized and confiscated by the League.

"Had the Chancellor knowledge of the scheme?" asked the prior, lowering his voice. They assented by a look which conveyed their regret that it should

be so. There were those who traced half Ulrich's misfortunes to his obstinate trust in his Chancellor, the wily Ambrosius Volland. The prior's glance responded, but, being a cautious man, he did not put his thoughts into words, and changed the subject by a suggestion that as they had broken their fast early and slightly, another meal would not be amiss, and led the way to the refectory, followed by the knights, while their attendants led the horses up and down waiting for their return.

Hildemund found Abbot Johannes and his guest sitting in silence. The abbot's full and florid cheeks were almost pale, and a furrow had appeared on his brow, as if he heartily regretted having disturbed his learned leisure by meddling in affairs outside of his monastery. It deepened as he reflected on his discovery that Ulrich was lending an ear to the teaching of Melanchthon and Luther, for not only did this make it a difficult matter for an orthodox prelate to assist him, but it rendered the breach between him and the fanatical House of Bavaria hopeless.

The Duke sat stern and gloomy, twisting in his fingers one of the long light brown tresses which had gained him as a boy his name of Ulrich of the Curly Locks, and his voice had a menacing sound in it as he called to Hildemund, as soon as the

monk who had conducted him had departed, "Come hither, boy, and speak to the point. Dost know of treachery towards me? How? Who sent thee to warn me?"

The short, stern questions had a roll as of thunder in them.

Hildemund answered briefly and clearly, and the abbot looked more and more disturbed.

"It would seem that all is known," he said, in great disquiet.

"Even so," answered Ulrich, curtly; and then, with a burst of the violence which all who knew him dreaded, "I would I knew who plays the traitor to my secret counsels; he should have a short shrift and speedy guerdon. Pah! who would be a prince? There is treachery in the very air we breathe."

He started up, and walked up and down the room in great agitation.

"My lord, my dear lord, I pray you look not so wildly," urged the abbot, rising too, but sitting down again in helpless perplexity.

"What! would you have me smile and speak smoothly, and say 'tis no matter that my words scarce breathed to myself are carried to mine enemies, so that they can lie in wait for me at their pleasure? Did I but so much as suspect who the

false friend can be—a dagger were too good for him.”

“My lord, my lord! speak not of daggers,” expostulated the abbot, in affright. “Once already——”

“Dare you call that to my mind?” thundered Ulrich, turning upon him, so that the abbot blinked and turned ashy pale. The Duke stood struggling with himself, and Hildemund, wishing himself a hundred miles away, could not but know that the unlucky speech of the abbot had recalled that fatal strife, the details of which were never clearly known, when the Duke’s false friend, von Hutten, fell by his hand. There was dead silence until Ulrich spoke again, seating himself once more, pale and exhausted with the mental conflict. “It boots not to think of it. Eberstein and Florian Duringsfeld have proved their truth by all sacrifices that man can make, and my Chancellor would scarce betray counsel. Nay, nay, look not so, good friend. I know how tongues wag against Master Volland, but I heed them not.”

“More’s the pity,” muttered Abbot Johannes. “And now what to do, my lord?”

“Return to Hohentwiel; but Ulrich of Würtemberg lives yet, and that shall his enemies know before the year is out. Aye, I feel that the tide is

turning; my star rises again. I shall yet sit in my palace of Stuttgart, and humble these proud heads; yes, and do justice to secret enemies. What says the old Latin proverb—‘The moon ever fills her horns again.’”

“Yes, yes, my lord,” escaped Hildemund with ardent conviction, while the abbot shook his head and kept silence.

“Ah! so thou hast faith in my fortunes?” said Ulrich, his look and tone changing into smiling kindness. “When that day comes, ask me what grace thou wilt, and it shall go hard but I grant it. I am yet thy debtor for thy little book. That debt, at least, I can pay, though scarce the warning thou didst cunningly convey to me. Wilt take this in exchange?”

He threw the gold chain which he had been wearing over Hildemund’s neck.

“My lord!” said the boy, almost speechless with surprise and pleasure.

“One thing more. Methought there was somewhat of meaning in thy voice when thou saidst that the Baron of Burgstein died yesterday. Ha! have I guessed aright?”

“Pardon me, your highness,” said Hildemund, colouring and embarrassed, “I saw not his death.

His men found him sorely gashed in the Eschthal, whither he had followed the chase alone."

"How? the boar slew him!"

"It was bruited about that he died of apoplexy, my lord."

"Bruit me no bruits! Say out what thou deemest truth in the matter," said Ulrich, with a touch of impatience.

"I saw nothing, my lord, and I would bring no charge I cannot prove."

"Ha! then none saw him die?"

"Only one who cannot bear witness; that same outcast of whom I spoke touching the lays that your highness inquired of."

"I guess somewhat of the story. One day it may yet come to light. Were I yet ruler of Württemberg I would sift it, for it concerns me nearly who owns the lands of this Freiherr; but it must stand over with many another matter. Thy name?"

"Hildemund Dahn."

"No peasant's son?"

"No, my lord. My father was a soldier, banner-bearer to Graf Geyer."

"And thou dwellest at Burgstein?"

"Not on the Burgstein lands, but those of Geyer border them."

"I shall remember thy name. Farewell, my boy; keep silence for thine own sake of these matters."

Hildemund bowed reverently to the Duke, and bent to receive the abbot's blessing. The interview was over for him, but Ulrich and the abbot remained yet awhile in consultation. However, before Hildemund quitted Sanct Anna he saw the little troop of Würtembergers ride out, escorted by a body of men-at-arms belonging to the cloister, lest the League should be lurking on the road to Hohen-twiel. Ulrich returned to his stronghold hardly having set foot on Würtemberg soil, but his bearing was as proud and dauntless as if his hopes and resolution only grew the stronger in disaster.

In the course of the afternoon Hildemund made his way to Schwanstadt, a busy little town, which had bought its freedom, and had guilds and a town council, manufactures and imports. He had customers there as well as in the Annenkloster, but not many, for the sympathies of the town were strongly Roman, and education was less flourishing than where the breath of the Reformation was blowing freely. He made his way homeward by another road, longer but safer, for he was not disposed to try the Hohlweg, where, if the Leaguers still lay in wait, they might not let him pass so easily as in

the morning. He struck again into the forest in the late afternoon, journeying on until he came to the Wunschthurm, a ruin of unknown age, standing on a rocky table-land, overlooking a sea of forest far and near.

There were strange tales about this tower, built on a spot which in heathen times had been held most sacred. The wood around was still called the Heiligenforst. Many a sacrifice had been offered here to heathen gods, and even yet a certain sanctity and awe clung to the place, where it was believed that on St. John's Eve all the witches in Germany gathered and churned up the storms which would be let loose over the land from the deep well in the tower during the next twelve months.

"I am glad it is but afternoon, though mother would chide me for fearing that such evil things could hurt a Christian," said Hildemund to himself as he saw the shattered walls. "I would not willingly be here at night. Now, in broad daylight, there is nought strange or fearful about the old place, except that all is so still. Anyhow I must rest me a bit, for I am right weary."

He loosed his pack, much lightened in the course of the day, and sat down to eat the remains of his provisions. The air was thick and heavy; the sky was lowering. Not a leaf moved; not a

bird sang. Soon great drops began to fall, striking the leaves like bullets, and a flash of jagged lightning ran down the sky, and was followed by a peal of crackling thunder, almost overhead.

"Nay, then," said Hildemund, startled and rising, "I may not stay under these trees. I must see if there be any shelter within the old walls. Surely it is less perilous there than here. What! another flash, and another! The storm will be a great one."

As he spoke a bolt of fire seemed to dart down and envelope a limb of an oak tree near, in its dark autumnal foliage. The thunder broke immediately, and for a moment all the sky seemed dark. When Hildemund's dazzled eyes could see again, the great branch was stripped and bleached—a dead skeleton. He hastily lifted his pack and hurried into the tower. Roofless and open to the sky it promised little shelter, but he espied some fallen masses of masonry over which ivy and clematis had climbed, tangling so densely among the stones and the bushes which had grown up among them that a kind of natural bower had been formed, under which he easily crept, at least protected from the sudden heavy gushes of rain, and putting his pack under his head he gladly stretched himself out. Weariness and the sultry air combined to

weigh down his eyes. While he was yet wondering how long the storm would last, and whether the Duke were out in it, he fell profoundly asleep. For a night and the best part of two days he had been afoot. He slept as a boy ought to sleep who had earned his rest so thoroughly. Neither the crash of thunder nor the vivid light flashing through his leafy covert roused him; nor the hardness of his couch, nor the gradual cooling of the air and clearing of the sky, which though dim and covered with light grey clouds, was no longer heavy and lowering. He slept on dreamlessly until nearly midnight.

When he awoke it was long before he could gather his senses. His limbs seemed still asleep, even when his mind began to grow active. He drew himself out of his bower, and looked around him in the veiled twilight. A pale, cloudy sky looked down on him when he raised his eyes upward, and he realised that it was night, and he was alone in the Wunschthurm. He did not like the discovery. A more ill-reputed spot there was not in Thuringia, and for aught he knew he had put himself into the power of evil spirits by sleeping on their haunted ground. As he stood, collecting his wits, he noted sounds without, strange and inexplicable at such a time and place; footsteps, and hushed murmuring voices; then a single

voice, rising and falling, with extraordinary strength and sweetness. Where Hildemund stood he could distinguish no words. He stood aghast. Were the unquiet spirits of the heathen dead gathered here, in the Holy Forest, where they had held their pagan rites in life, and was this voice the voice of some hero who had ruled them, and perhaps built this tower? Strong curiosity overcame all other feelings. Hildemund signed himself with the cross, and then, as the phantoms seemed yet to linger, and the mysterious speaker continued to address them, he seized the thick old ivy which clothed the walls and climbed up into a loophole whence he could look down on the rocky platform below. The scene which met his eyes made him doubt if he were not still dreaming.

All around the forest lay in dark motionless masses; the moon was hidden by the cloudy veil which covered the sky. But streams of ruddy light flickered and quivered, and wavering bluish smoke rose into the air from torches thrust into the ground wherever the soil was deep enough to hold them. The glare fell on the old tower and the fragments of masonry beneath, and on the eager faces of a crowd all turned towards a man who stood slightly above them on a broken mossy pile of stones, fallen years before from the tower overhead. It was his

voice which held them all entranced, the voice which had reached Hildemund, one of those which are the rare and delightful gift of a few great orators, full of passion and pathos, heard in its lowest tones as distinctly at the very edge of a crowd as when uplifted like a trumpet call. It had been said of this man that only to hear him speak made the poorest listener feel rich and happy. In an age when physical strength and a stately person were the objects of all men's admiration, a weakling, unless, indeed, an ecclesiastic, had small chance of ruling others, yet this speaker, slight, frail, youthful, humbly dressed, with the broad hat of the demagogue of that day, as he stood there pouring out words of fiery ardour, his eyes all glowing and melting, his gestures slight, unconscious but full of eloquence, held the hearts of his listeners in his hand. These peasants and miners, with their deep brooding sense of centuries of wrong, their perception that a time had come when they could make themselves heard, their dim, distorted apprehension of gospel teaching of brotherhood and equality, followed all that he uttered with a triumphant sense that one had arisen who felt for and with them, who could not be silenced, who had his own wrongs and those of his kindred to goad him. For a century past mysticism and fanaticism had

taken deep root in Thuringian soil. Here the Flagellants had longest persisted, and here many a Brother of the Cross had been burned. This disciple of Abbot Joachim, the wild prophet of Calabria, spoke to men but too ready to listen.

"I must go upon the face of the earth," he was saying, when Hildemund reached his coign of vantage, "and never rest until all be overthrown which hinders Christ's kingdom. The nobles must perish who torture and slay our brethren, and these priests who lie in the lap of luxury and touch not the burdens which they lay on others with so much as the tip of a finger: and this Master Softlips whom men call Martin Luther, who cries to the peasant, 'Lie thou still under the foot of the rich.' These are they of whom it is written, 'Bring mine enemies, and slay them before mine eyes.' Men and brethren, be not turned aside nor stayed, lest woe upon woe come on you and your children. Hitherto if ye kill the wild beast which has devoured your crops, ye are but maimed or blinded; soon ye will be run through with spears. Serfs and peasants are ye now, bound to your lords; soon will ye be sold into slavery. Rise, and be ye men! Take spear and sword, and smite. He who will only have love and sweetness kills himself with honey. Humble yourself to no priest, seek no walls wherein to worship,

seek repentance even as I have done. Ask that ye may be burned and purged here so as ye may be saved hereafter. Stand firm, and hold each others' hands, and ye shall go from glory to glory, and nobles and tonsured heads shall lie at your feet. So saith the vision granted unto me, and it cannot lie. I saw before me a field blood-red, and therein lay all princes and nobles slain, and their goods were divided among the faithful, and a voice as of a trumpet of war cried unto me, 'Go forth, my disciple, Thomas Münzer, and tell these things in the ears of all people.' And I have obeyed."

There was a deep murmur as he paused, lifting up his eyes as if he would have looked through the sky over him, to challenge confirmation of his declaration. From among the crowd nearest to him a tall, swarthy man stepped out, and stood by Münzer. Hildemund recognised Kaspar.

"Ye have heard," he exclaimed, in a voice thrilling with triumph; "we have but to obey and follow."

"Yet mark this," said Münzer, checking the cry which arose in answer, "we mean no rebellion against our sovereign lord the Kaiser. I have no message against him, nor does any voice bid me overthrow his throne. Rather do I believe that if we could lay our wrongs before him, and bring to

his ear what we desire, he would listen and do us justice. As yet it hath not been shown me how to lay our matters before him, but a way will surely be opened."

"We must all be of one mind as to what we demand," said Kaspar, "and the matter must be laid before our brethren elsewhere. Listen, all, while this messenger of heaven shall read the articles whereon we have fallen, and, if you stand by them, lift up your hands."

There was breathless silence once more as the voice of Münzer again arose with its full mellow swell, to read those twelve articles which became so famous later both for the clearness and precision with which they were drawn up, and the moderation which marked them. Hildemund had drawn back as far as he could into his shelter, too eager to hear and see what was passing to quit it, but well aware of what would be the fate of a listener, if discovered. He started as he heard the articles, and recognised words which he himself had used to Kaspar. Many a time had he been the recipient of Kaspar's wrath and longings, and often too had he discussed them with one to whom he carried all his difficulties, the nameless outcast of whom he had spoken to the Duke. He it was who had felt that the peasants could do nothing unless they

formulated their grievances; he it was who had suggested the very words which Kaspar had faithfully recollected and passed on to Münzer.

A hum of comment followed. "Aye, game, fish, and fowl free to all; that is right, nor shall they ravage the fields which are God's gift to men," repeated voice after voice. "It is a quite unsuitable and unbrotherly thing that the poor man has no right to catch game or fish. And the false weights shall be done away whereby the bailiffs cheat us, and there shall be one coinage for all the realm. Nor shall there be heriot nor death-tax. Aye, an these things were altered, we might live. Noble and priest might live as they would if they would grant us these things."

"That they never will," said Münzer, scornfully.

"Say you so? Then they must go down."

"They shall be given for a prey unto your teeth, and in that day spare neither man, nor woman, nor child among them. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, as it is written. As they have served you, even so serve them. Spare not, as Saul did Agag, lest a worse thing come unto you. But stir not until the day and the hour are come; the time is at hand, but we must not move until our brethren of Franconia and Würtemberg be ready. In Fran-

conia alone there are fifty thousand men and more ready to join you."

"Have I not told you all through these years that the time would come," exclaimed Kaspar, with wild excitement, "told you again and yet again that the Bundschuh would rise out of the dust wherein tyrants have trampled it? Think of your brethren, hanged and quartered, shot and tortured: shall not a day of reckoning come for these things?" .

"No lords, no priests, no castles," answered many voices, as the assembly began to grow more and more moved, and the first caution and timidity melted away.

"We must have the old banner to lead us again," said a man in the throng, who, like many others there, was a vagabond soldier, out of employ, and eager to fish in troubled waters.

"Aye, the Bundschuh, and the crossed scythes—but how to get it made? Who will have a hand in that? Were it seen, it would bring death on him who meddled therein, and betray us all, maybe."

"That will I see to," said Kaspar, who evidently after Münzer was the ruling spirit of the meeting. "Barthel here knows a man who will do it if we say 'tis but for a shoemaker's sign."

"But the silks must be bought and the work

paid for," said the man addressed as Barthel, a sturdy red-bearded fellow, with a spiked club in his hand, a ring of images round his hat, and a wallet before and behind, unmistakable tokens that he was of the great fraternity of licensed beggars, who wandered about under the patronage of our Lady of Einsiedeln. There was a perceptible hesitation, and a voice muttered, "If one has to pay, one might as well give due to one's lord."

"I am as poor as yourselves, but what I can give I will," said Münzer.

"And I have a broad piece here," said Kaspar, holding out the coin which Hildemund had given him the night before.

"I sold my flax last week; I will give what I got for it," said a thin peasant, who looked as if he had never had a full meal in his life.

"I need scarce warn you that if but one word be breathed touching these matters, the lives not only of those here but throughout the land are forfeit," said Münzer. "If the fiend prompt any to babble, be he son, or brother, or father, stop the words with knife or cord before he betray his brethren and peril the holy cause."

"We swear it," said Kaspar, and the crowd took up the words like a deep echo.

"Barthel and Stauffer, who know all the country

round, and meet their brethren at guilds and wakes, will bring tidings here of how our cause prospers, and Kaspar will lead you when the time comes. Our watchword is, 'It is ever darkest before the dawn.'"

"It is ever darkest before dawn," repeated everyone, pointing down as Münzer had done to the shoe tied high on the ankle which all peasants wore.

"And now, brethren, to your homes; be silent, be ready, and the spring-tide shall see your enemies ground to dust and their lands given unto you. I go my way, and I think we shall never see each other again, for my visions speak of a life laid down for the cause, and truly I think that that life is mine. So be it, Lord, I come!"

He stepped down from the spot where he had hitherto stood, drew his cloak around him, and disappeared into the darkness which seemed to swallow him up. There was a brief hush, and then a murmured consultation among the men, who clustered round Kaspar as a recognised leader. Then the torches were extinguished, and the blackened ends flung into the brushwood, and everyone left the spot, and vanished into the forest, and the old tower stood silent and solitary under the pale sky.

It was some time before Hildemund ventured to descend, and longer before he felt it safe to leave the Wünschthurm. It was no light thing thus to have become possessed of such a secret, and he was astounded by what he had seen and heard. He went about too much among the people not to be aware that there was a deep and sullen movement among the peasantry, in which the towns were inclined to sympathise; as far as they were cognisant of it, inasmuch as it was directed against their natural enemies the nobles, but the upper classes were haughtily certain that the ruthless chastisement inflicted on the serfs and peasants concerned in the "Poor Conrad" insurrection had thoroughly subdued them, and were blind and deaf to the ominous signs which should have warned them. Here and there indeed a timid or generous prelate or lord had yielded to the demands of urgent dependents, but these were rare exceptions. Hildemund had had no conception how widely and deeply the movement had spread; Münzer's declaration that fifty thousand peasants in Franconia alone only waited the signal to rise filled him with surprise, though he did not question the truth of the statement. The numbers at this secret assembly, the understanding among them, the order and discipline observed, all went to prove a state of things

no doubt general. How they were thus gathered together, how Kaspar had learned to know Münzer, and what the next step would be, Hildemund could not guess. Probably the licensed beggars, who went everywhere unquestioned, and hated nobles and priests to a man, were intermediaries. That a terrible day of reckoning with the upper classes was at hand he could not doubt, yet it was hard to believe that ill-armed, untrained peasants, even when furious with wrong and passions let loose, could stand before the chivalry of Germany. Yet . . . fifty thousand peasants in Franconia alone . . . that meant incalculable possibilities. Hildemund had no secrets from his mother; he resolved to tell her the whole story of what he had seen and heard that night—her, and one other. It was strange that the friend to whom he most looked up, and regarded with reverence only equalled by compassion, should be one whom others would have looked on with scorn and shrunk from with loathing—the leper of the Eschthal.

CHAPTER IX.

THE burial of the last Baron of Burgstein was conducted with due state; masses were sung and prayers said, and there was a great banquet, to which all the country side were bidden. Then all settled down into stillness; but Graf Lichtenberg had no intention of remaining longer in this out-of-the-way corner of the world than was necessary to secure his schemes. He wanted to visit the Bishop of Würzburg and join Markgraf Kasimir with a following of men and a supply of money as soon as possible, and fully explain how it was that he had not been more active in aiding that plot against Duke Ulrich, which had been so strangely baffled by his sudden return to Hohentwiel. But before he quitted Burgstein he meant that such a solemn betrothal of the little heiress and his son should take place as should be almost as indissoluble as marriage itself. It would be easy to sweep aside the feeble opposition of the widowed Freifrau, even though backed by the faithful old seneschal, who

still obstinately kept his place, though the other old servants, who had grown grey in the service of Burgstein, and most of the men-at-arms, had withdrawn of their own accord, and their places had been filled by retainers of the Graf's. He had gathered up the reins of power in a calm, matter-of-course way, which there was no one to gainsay, and ruled the whole castle as if it were his own, and as such Wolfgang regarded it, and filled it with his noisy presence, domineering to his heart's content over everyone in it except old Walther, for whom he had a certain respect, and showing small courtesy to the widowed lady, who was the real mistress of the castle, in right of her child. She regarded him with the intense aversion of a cold and tenacious nature, and the Graf knew that consent on her part to the betrothal could not be hoped for; but this silent, timid woman, whom the Freiherr used to speak of with a kind of jovial contempt as "My lady abbess," was not an opponent to be feared or spared.

But if apparently as easily bent as a rush under the wind, Freifrau Faustina possessed equal tenacity, with the strong instincts of a weak and obstinate woman of outward submission and secret rebellion. It was ingrain in her to prefer to gain her way by stratagem, and to defeat opposition by appearing to

yield. The sobriquet of her husband, provoked by her nun-like dress and demeanour, was doubly appropriate. From childhood she had been educated with a view to her becoming Abbess of Rothenburg, the wealthy cloister where generations of her family had ruled; but the death of her only brother had too entirely altered her position to admit of her taking the veil, and the frightened, reluctant girl left the retreat where all her interests centred, to become the wife of a man twice her age, whose rough joviality, deep drinking, and hearty contempt for everything most revered by her, filled her with dismay and shrinking. Far from seeking to win his affections or gain a wifely feeling towards him, she would have looked on such an attempt as sinful. If use and time somewhat softened her aversion and terror, and accustomed her to her life, she never shook off the haunting fear that, however involuntary, her desertion of a conventual life for a secular one, even though it were a daily petty martyrdom, was a terrible sin, to be expiated by penances and almsgiving, and, above all, by devoting a child of hers to a "religious" life. Even before Rosilde's birth she was vowed to a convent. It had not occurred to the Freifrau that no more children might follow, and that the difficulty in her own case might occur over again. The desire to

give her child to the Church became her one thought, filling her whole mind, and she never gave up the hope and determination to thwart her husband's plan of betrothing Rosilde to his cousin's son. Never since she quitted the cloister for the world had she known such a gleam of joy as when the kinsmen fell out, and Baron Dietrich loudly declared that Rosilde was not for young Wolfgang. Her prayers were answered, she thought; for the first time she felt herself perhaps forgiven by heaven, and free from the pains and penalties which had been hanging over her head. The death of her husband was a shock which went deep; Walther was right when, with some surprise, he observed to his grandchild Bärbele, that it had knocked many nails into her coffin. Far keener than any natural grief or horror which she was capable of feeling was the thought that this sudden, unassailed death was a sign of divine wrath, delayed long only to crush more utterly. He had married one devoted to a life of virginity and poverty, and this was the consequence. It deepened, if possible, her determination that her child should carry the wealth of Burgstein to Kloster Rothenburg, whither she herself intended to retire, and she was quite unprepared for the smiling assurance of Graf Lichtenberg, that though entirely at liberty to quit

the world herself, as next male relation he controlled the future of Rosilde.

There was no one to appeal to. Duke Ulrich was in exile; his Duchy was in the hands of the Swabian League, good friends of Graf Lichtenberg's. Freifrau Faustina said little, but a frenzy of superstitious terror seized her at the thought that her expiation might be hindered, her vow unfulfilled. She would have cast herself on Pfarrer Basil for advice and help, but the Graf knew something of him, and had no mind that so formidable an ally should be called into council. He hinted that this priest, exiled to Eschthal, was a heretic, and the very word was enough to fill her with aversion and fear. Thrown on herself she would have yielded had anything but the terrors of religion been in the case; but these were so mighty that they made her strong. There was yet one person on whom she could depend, though she had had little intercourse with him in the years she had spent at Burgstein, and she bade Barbara summon Walther the senechal to a secret conference. He had hardly seen her since his lord's funeral, and he thought her more nun-like, white, and wasted than ever in her widow's mourning; her frail figure shaken by the irregular beating of her heart, and her dark eyes looking the blacker from their contrast to her thin

and pallid cheeks. He kissed the hot, tremulous hand which she held out to him while bidding Barbara leave them. The girl went to seek Rosilde, whose voice she heard ringing passionately in dispute with Wolfgang, who seemed to take a malicious delight in irritating her. Bärbele hated the big, rude Junker who angered her little lady. "By-and-by, when you are my wife, you will have to obey me," he was saying.

"Yes, when! By-and-by leads to the house of Never," she retorted, as Barbara led her away, casting a fiery look at Wolfgang, who was as uncivil to the maid as to the mistress. "If I were a noble and hoped to be a bridegroom, I would treat my lady otherwise," she muttered audibly.

"No doubt! women have long hair and short wits," answered Wolfgang, with a loud laugh at his own smart saying, while he made a vain attempt to seize her long plaits of fair hair.

Meanwhile, under her breath, and listening to every sound, Freifrau Faustina was saying to Walther: "You know what the Graf seeks to bring about? You heard my lord say it should never be; and now he lies in his grave and they would have me cross his will. It were sacrilege, good Walther."

With instinctive art she made no allusion to her

real feeling in the matter, but appealed to what would most move the old retainer.

"Yes, my lady," he answered, very gravely.

She waited to see if he would say more, but as he paused she went on, even lower, but her eyes glowed with fevered eagerness: "It must not be, Walther; it were a great sin!"

"A great sin, truly," he repeated with emphasis, while inwardly asking himself if he should tell her his reasons for saying so.

"I would rather she died, Walther. O holy Mother! how much rather. I have given her to Heaven; she is the bride of Christ. I would bid the Graf take the lands and the wealth, but they should go as her dowry. Father Philip has ever said—he told me so again when last he came—that if I gave her and them to Rothenburg my sin would be atoned, nay, turned into a merit. And now!—O blessed Mary, Queen of Heaven, help me in this strait!"

"You would make the child a nun!" exclaimed Walther.

"Yes, yes. See you not that it is the only way to expiate the sin of my youth—and that of your lord, good Walther," she added, quickly. "It touches us both."

Walther was silent. He was nearly as much

averse to this plan for the heiress of Burgstein as to giving her to Wolfgang.

"Have you nought to say?" asked the Freifrau, impatiently.

"We are in a sore plight," muttered the senechal.

"If I had known that was all the comfort you could bring, I had not bidden you here. Sore indeed! The Graf presses on the thing ere he rides to Würzburg two days hence."

"So soon!" exclaimed Walther, in dismay.

"I will not have it, Walther. Find help; you loved my lord. The child must hence to Rothenburg."

"Madam, the way is long, nor would the Graf let us bear her hence. His own men keep the gates now; there is scarce one of us left in the castle."

"She must go, I tell you. Get her but hence, and I will follow later."

Walther looked at the eager, tremulous creature, and a great doubt seized him if she would ever leave Burgstein.

"But if I could do this thing, dear lady, what would befall you, so frail and sickly, when it were known? How could you bear the Graf's anger? it can be terrible, I wot well, and all the more that it burns cold."

"It matters not, so she is safely away. All these years I have prayed and fasted and vowed I would atone if only I might be pardoned and my purgatory made short Sweet St. Alexis, speak for me! If we can suffer so much here, what must the burning and purging in those fires be?"

"Dear lady, how lies any fault at your door? You came not willingly here," said Walther, recalling, and for the first time with pity, the arrival of the reluctant, tearful, repellant bride, who had chilled all the ready welcomes prepared for her by her stone-cold demeanour.

"Alas! if I came not willingly, I have not always grieved as I ought that I left Rothenburg; I have sometimes taken pleasure in my life, and sought earthly comfort. I am verily guilty in that. Father Philip said so. Pray for me, unworthy, O blessed St. Justina! I will atone; I vow it again; children can atone for the sins of their parents; I give all I have."

She caught at the rosary hanging to her girdle, murmuring hurried prayers, while Walther was thinking out possibilities. "My lady," he said presently, and there was that in the grave voice and honourable, straightforward bearing of the man which inspired even her timid and suspicious nature with confidence, "if our little mistress went

to Rothenburg, strong though the sisterhood be, and ill to meddle with, it could not hold her back from the Graf, with the League and Kasimir of Brandenburg behind him. Rothenburg is no friend to the Markgraf, who dallies, they say, with Luther——”

“Mary and Joseph! is he so lost as that?”

“It is so said, madam; but though the same is bruited of the Duke, doubtless the convent would rather that the broad lands in Württemberg were held under him, could he but regain his throne, than of the League; yet shelter our Fräulein they cannot. It is there she would first be sought. If I may offer my humble counsel, it were best to hide her for a time so near that none will think of seeking her there, and let time bring counsel as to Rothenburg.”

“But where to hide her? Who will dare shelter her?”

“You may remember Frau Magdalene Dahn, madam?”

“The fair, tall woman who came here once when I was nigh to death and healed me with her herbs and her touch? Never, since I left Rothenburg, saw I face so calm and sweet.”

“She dwells on the Geyer lands, in the house

of her late husband, the Bannwart, with none with her but her young son, a brave lad and a gracious."

"Is it there you would take the child?"

"Even so, my lady."

"But will this Frau Dahn risk so much? Spare not gold, good seneschal."

"Magdalene Dahn needs no gold where a kind deed is toward, and I think no safer place can be found for a while. Later, when the first search is over, it may be easier to bear Dornröschen elsewhere." He gave her unconsciously his own pet name for her; his heart yearned over the little one, whose mother was so ready to part from her.

"Yes, yes, the saints have heard me; I shall accomplish my vow. But time presses, and how to have her out of the castle?"

"With your leave, noble lady, I will not speak of that; it were best you only knew she had left Burgstein. I would not that Bärbele knew aught of the matter," he added, with a pang of fear lest his grandchild should be called to account. "The Graf will question everyone; heaven grant he rest content with questions!"

"Bärbele? Sure to her the risk is little."

"I know not that, madam," answered Walther, angered by the indifference of look and tone.

"The aim is too weighty to let a small matter stand in the way."

"Pardon me, madam, it is no small matter to me, nor to her parents, though it may seem so in your eyes."

Freifrau Faustina had forcibly to gather her thoughts, set on the all-important matter of executing her project, before she could understand Walther's point of view. That he and Barbara and herself should all be sacrificed, so long as she could carry out her plan, seemed a very small matter; but since he would not see it so she answered, with a touch of petulance, "I will take all on myself; the Graf shall blame none but me; I promise it. Bärbele need know nothing."

"If you would let me take the child to-night, lady——" he said, hesitatingly.

"To-night!" Her eyes glowed; she half rose. "To-night, good Walther?" He need not have feared reluctance.

"Yes, madam, I would fetch her when all are gone to rest, but I must be back in my place ere any stir."

"I will tell Bärbele that I will have her to sleep with me, and I will make up a bundle of clothes for her to take. To-night!" she repeated, with the same feverish eagerness as before. Her pale cheeks

grew flushed; her eyes glittered strangely. Walther looked at her uneasily. He almost felt as if a ghost were talking to him.

"The thing must be. Our Fräulein cannot wed the son of him who—— St. Eustace! what am I saying? Yet surely this is a sore parting, gracious lady?"

"I gave her away ere her birth—she is more mine now than she ever was before; till now she has been her father's child—but I have waited. I knew my time would come," she said, smiling strangely, as she kissed the crucifix suspended to her rosary. Walther kept a respectful silence, but his heart turned against this woman, encased in her spiritual selfishness.

Barbara noted all the rest of the day a restless excitement about her lady, an unquiet, expectant air, altogether unlike her usual still and passionless demeanour. She thought it seemed more like joy than sorrow, and asked herself with increasing surprise what was the meaning of the occasional vehement caresses which her mistress bestowed on the little Rosilde, who, unaccustomed to such demonstrations from a mother cold by nature and on principle, raised great wondering eyes to her face, and showed more surprise than pleasure. "My little daughter! thou wilt make all well for me!"

she whispered. "I give thee instead of myself. Listen, child, one day thou wilt have a new name, a beautiful name—they would not let me call thee so at baptism, but it shall be thy name in religion—Justina. Yes, thou shalt be called after the fair virgin of Antioch, who listened not to the pleading of her lover, Aglaides, no, not when he called the great necromancer, Cyprian, to his aid, who set demons around her bed, and sent fair, sinful images to beset her thoughts, but she cut off her long hair and offered it to Mary, and would none of the pleasures of this wicked world. Thou shalt be like her. Would not that be a blessed life, my little daughter?"

Receiving no answer, she repeated the question, laying on the child's shoulder her slender, frail hand, which yet could clasp with unexpected force. Rosilde withdrew herself by a sudden movement from the touch, and answered pouting, "I do not want a new name, and I will not cut off my hair. She was a witless lass, or she would have married her bridegroom, and ridden to church on a tall, brown steed."

To ride a charger like the Freiherr's was Rosilde's darling ambition.

"Go—thou art ever thy father's child!" said

Freifrau Faustina, with a gesture of sick-hearted impatience.

Rosilde took her at her word and disappeared. By-and-by Walther, passing through the hall, found her sobbing passionately under the Freiherr's coat of mail. It was long before he could learn what had thus troubled her; to his questions, had the Junker displeased her? had Bärbele crossed her? she only shook her head sobbing, but at length he caught the words, "I will not have my hair cut off; my lord father used to stroke it. I want my lord father!"

"Ah, poor child, well you may!" said the old seneschal, with tears in his eyes.

Freifrau Faustina had no difficulty in making her preparations unobserved. Unlike most ladies of her rank and wealth she had no personal attendants, for she led as ascetic a life of rule and discipline as was possible to her, accepting no service, and denying herself every luxury. The inhabitants of the castle were chiefly men; she had led an absolutely solitary life. The Freiherr had laughed at her ways, and been alienated by them, but he was too indifferent to what she did to cross her when she did not interfere with him. Walther found her on her knees by her sleeping child when he came

cautiously to her chamber that night. "Is it time?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, my lady, full time. If only the little one does not wake!"

"There are herbs that bring sleep; Bärbele has wanted me to use them for myself, but I seek no rest, I would keep vigil and pray, not indulge my vile body—yet I think St. Justina sent her the good thought, for I could use them for the child. Lift her; you need not fear; she sleeps soundly."

She did; Walther stood for a moment looking at her as she lay in beautiful, rosy slumber, a child to be proud of, to make a mother smother her with kisses, and feel her heart full of joy and gratitude that so sweet a creature was all her own. But this mother was only eager to see her borne beyond the walls of Burgstein, and to know the first step towards the object of her life was made. Walther fastened the little packet of clothes on his shoulder, lifted the child on his arm, tenderly and carefully, and waited a moment that Faustina might embrace her. It never crossed her mind to do so. "Why do you linger?" she asked, with nervous impatience. "Each moment is precious."

"It is so; farewell, lady," said Walther, and he walked with noiseless, unshod steps from the room. She observed that his steps made no sound, and

that he had a lamp in his hand, but that might be merely to light him through the passages. It mattered little, after all, whither he was going, or how, so long as he effected the escape. She knelt on far into the dawn, in a tumult of anxiety, hope and fear, which left little space for thinking what Graf Lichtenberg would say or do when he learned the flight of the little bride-elect. She had triumphed over all the obstacles which had stood in her way, the first step was made; and surely the saints would keep the child entrusted to their care safely hidden until she could be placed in the hands of the sisters of Rothenburg.

CHAPTER X.

No one crossed Walther's path as he carried the sleeping child through the passages of the castle and into that underground way which Hildemund had traversed. He had taken good care that his lamp should burn well and long, and his only difficulty was to carry his burden safely when the path lay on a narrow ledge above the stream; but he strode on fast, his thoughts full of the questions how to place her in safety, and what would befall if the Freifrau should die. The very audacity of the scheme would probably ensure present safety. Who could suppose the fugitive within a league of Burgstein? The most pressing danger would be that some one seeking Magdalene's aid in sickness or trouble might recognise her, but this, if she would only refrain from betraying herself, was not a great risk. She had seldom left the castle, and few who would visit Frau Dahn would know her by sight. For himself, no doubt a bad time awaited him. The Graf would know that he only could have contrived her flight, and the Graf was not a man

to stop at any means of discovering where she was. Yet he could not desert his post, and leave his liege lady to bear the brunt of von Lichtenberg's wrath, little as he loved her. She would not live long, of that he felt sure. There was a death-like look about her which had struck him very much. He must return, come what might, and see her through the storm about to break upon her. Walther's heart was very sore at thus bearing the little lady of Burgstein out of her father's castle, and at knowing who was the real master there. Many a time he had hardly been able to control himself on coming across Kunz, though he was but the tool of another. His mind was so full of anxious thought that he had reached the mouth of the passage much sooner than he expected, and stepping forth into the open air looked cautiously around. No one was near; all was silent and solitary, and he made his way as fast as he could down the descent to the valley, and then upward again through the forest to the house of the Bannwart. His imperative knock roused Magdalene; she thought it was some one come to call her to a sick bed or seek an urgent remedy, and looking out of the window she bade him wait but a moment and she would come.

"Who is here?" she asked, as she opened the door.

"One who brings sore peril to your house, I fear me, Frau," answered Walther.

She recognised the voice. "Enter, master senechal. What! the child!"

"Even so, alas!" said Walther, closing the door, and sitting down with the little sleeping head tenderly nestled on his breast. He removed the muffler around it, and she looked lovingly at the little face, the round, rosy cheeks on which a sweeping fringe of brown lashes rested, the blue-veined forehead, and parted rosebud mouth.

"You know all that Hildemund could tell?" he asked. She signed assent. "Need I say, then, that no choice but flight remains unless she wed the son of him who did her father to death?"

"The poor mother!"

"Waste no pity on her, Frau. Her heart is stone, I think. Her only thought is to buy her soul's salvation by giving this child, the last of her noble line, the heiress of Burgstein and Rosenthal, to the cloister."

"Nay, that must not be, Master Walther. None may use the life of another for himself. It is a heavy sin, moreover, to pledge one too young to know good from evil to serve God in a cloister—nay, too young to know whether it be for her good or evil. Who shall say whether the dear Lord have

not work in His world for this little one? What are we that we should rudely grasp and wrest His purposes before the time?"

"So do I also feel, and truly my hope is that she will never see the inside of Rothenburg. Never liked I this Father Philip, who stirs up my lady to think herself such a miserable sinner that nothing less than all the wealth of Burgstein can atone for her guilt. Had he bidden her give her husband kind looks and words it were more Christian, and had been better for us all!"

"Yet it may well be he is a good man according to his lights, but taught to think that whatever profits the convent whereof he is confessor must needs be right. What think you then to do with this poor babe?"

"In truth I know not; I can but wait and hope. She can fare better nowhere than here."

Walther took it for granted that Magdalene would run the heavy risk, and with the same simplicity she accepted his trust without a question. The little one began to stir; the effects of the sleeping draught were passing off, and lifting her head she looked round bewildered. "Bärbele!" she said, and Frau Dahn noted that it was her maid, not her mother, whom she called. A great pity for the child filled her heart. Walther soothed and reas-

sured her, and the inherited courage of her race showed itself in the little thing's demeanour, for far from being alarmed by her strange, unknown surroundings, she roused herself up at once full of curiosity and inquiry.

"Who is that?" she asked, looking hard at Magdalene by the dim light of the lamp which Frau Dahn had kindled. "Hildemund's mother? And where is Hildemund? Does he know I am here? Why am I come here?"

"Listen, my little mistress," said the old senechal, taking both her hands and setting her before him. "Do you recollect how the Freiherr your father said he would not have you wed Junker Wolfgang? We must not go against his will now he is dead; that would be a sore thing, and a sin when he is not here to enforce his will."

Rosilde nodded, keeping her large, limpid eyes fixed on his face expectantly.

"But your kinsman the Graf heeds not at all what my lord said, and would give you to this Junker, and your lady mother saw no way to hinder it but to send you here in hiding. Good Frau Magdalene will tend you well and keep you safe, and you must heed all she says and obey her dutifully."

Rosilde looked from one to the other and back

again. Discipline in those days was severe, but she had escaped it almost entirely, with a mother who kept her aloof, and a father who treated her when he saw anything of her as a pretty toy. "Am I to stay here long?" she asked.

"I do not know, my child."

"I will not marry Wolfgang," was her next remark. "I would rather marry Hildemund, if he were noble."

Walther laughed in spite of himself. "And you would do well, my little lady," he said. "I would for your sake he were noble born."

Perhaps, unworldly as she was, the daughter of the great Paumgärtner family thought her son the equal of an illiterate, unmannered nobleman, less rich, for all his wealth and lands, than they. "These be idle words," she said, a faint colour deepening on her cheek. "Rather let us think how best to conceal that I have anything to hide. Many come here for herbs and counsel; she may be seen, and she has no peasant air."

"I am not a peasant!" exclaimed the child.

"She must pass as of your kindred, Frau—a niece, perchance."

"I like not feigning," said Magdalene, reluctantly, while Rosilde gazed from one to the other aghast at such a proposal. "I would rather say the truth,

that she is the child of a sick mother in sore trouble, who knows not where to bestow her."

"As you will, Frau, but keep her out of sight, and treat her as your own. What will you call her?"

"Call me!" said Rosilde, in high disapproval of all these suggestions.

"Yes, leaf of my heart! Do you think you can be the little Freifräulein here in hiding, or even bear your name of Rosilde? the old Burgstein name!"

"But I *am* a Freifräulein, and Burgstein is mine."

"Alack, yes."

"And because you are noble by birth you need care little whether for awhile you bear a title or not, since that cannot change you, nor take away your birthright," said Magdalene.

The child looked at her, resentful of the grave tone, yet perfectly comprehending the argument.

"See, my little lady," said Walther, urgently; "Frau Magdalene risks much in housing you; it would belike cost her her life and Hildemund's were it known. You would do nought to bring harm on the roof that shelters you so kindly?"

She turned her eyes on him and seemed trying to understand.

"I will be called Dornröschen," she said, abruptly; "it is a pretty name, and I shall be like Dorn-

röschen who was hidden in a long, long sleep within the magic wood until the prince came. And, if you like, you may say *thou* to me."

Walther kissed and praised her, while again explaining to her the deep necessity for caution and obedience, and Magdalene recognised something noble in the child underlying her petulant waywardness.

"I may not stay; it grows late," said Walther, rising. "Let the kind Frau take you to bed, sweetheart. May God bless and keep the last rose of Burgstein!"

"You will come back?" said the child, tears rising as she saw herself about to be left.

"Yes, yes, when I dare do so. Farewell, Frau."

He hurried away, his own eyes very misty. It was growing light when he reached the spot where the Pöllatwasser leapt from its cavern; and he paused and looked down on the church far below. He could distinguish the stone cross of roses, the badge of Burgstein, upon it, and took off his hat and said a prayer from his heart for the last of the race. Then he thought uneasily how light it was growing, and wished he had not delayed so long on his way back. All at once, he thought, something more than wind or beast stirred in the bushes. He thrust them suddenly aside, and perceived a human

form, crouching and peering through them, which sprang up and faced him on finding itself discovered, and Walther recognised Kunz.

"St. Eustace! murderer of my master, is it thou dogging me?" he shouted, flinging himself upon him. Though Walther was tall and robust, yet Kunz was strongly built and very powerful, and his years were fewer than those of the seneschal. In other circumstances he must have had the advantage in a struggle; but, taken by surprise, terrified and paralysed by the invocation of St. Eustace, and the charge coupled with it, he wrenched himself loose, staggered, and fell headlong over the rocks. With great difficulty Walther saved himself from following him, and peered over. Kunz lay far down, a motionless heap.

"I think thou wilt tell no tales," muttered Walther; "would I could pay our debt to thy master as honestly!"

He made his way back and sought his mistress to tell her what had befallen.

"Is he dead? Are you sure?" she asked, trembling. "Heaven grant it! Had he followed, think you?"

"No, of that I am sure, gracious lady; he was returning from some errand for his lord. I bethink me that he was sent out yester-even, and must have

been going up before me. Either he did not want to be seen, or, perceiving me, marvelled whence I came, and sought to watch me."

"But if it be known how this befell! he will be found and brought here, and if he yet live he will reveal that you fell upon him, and the Graf will have you to the dungeon. You must not risk that; you must be where you can reach the child, and where I can send you word what to do. You must to Marienau; Rothenburg is too far, but Prior Thomas will shelter you if you show this ring."

She drew one, with the arms of her own family, off her finger.

"Lose no time, but fly."

It went sorely against him to obey.

"I am your liege lady, and I speak in the name of my lord and of our child," she said, haughtily, as she saw his hesitation. "You have been a faithful servant; would you fail us now at this pinch?"

"No, madam; I go," he answered, yielding to the tone of command through which he seemed to hear his dead lord speak. "My poor Bärbele; you will seek to protect her, lady?"

"Have I not said so? Go!"

Walther obeyed, but he could not make up his mind to escape secretly. He fetched a horse out of the stables, and rode openly out at the gates. The

porter lowered the drawbridge doubtfully, and looked long after him, but he had no authority to stay the seneschal of the castle; and the fearless openness of his departure lulled suspicion. He rode hard for some hours, but no one followed, and by the afternoon he was safe in Marienau.

The first to discover Rosilde's absence was Bärbele, but her exclamations were coldly and sternly checked by her lady, and she guessed enough to say nothing. In the course of the day some peasants discovered Kunz and brought him in, so battered and stunned that for many hours he could give no account of himself, and, even when he could speak, he rambled incoherently about the Freiherr and St. Eustace and the seneschal, and uttered maledictions on the saint for thus unfairly taking vengeance on him when he had been absolved, and was prepared to buy an indulgence at the very first opportunity. His master's suspicions were at once awakened, and he proceeded to the chambers of the Freifrau. She was sitting in her tall carved chair, and met him with a look so triumphant and defiant that he at once exclaimed, "What foul plot is here? Where is the child?"

"Out of your hands, by the help of heaven," she answered.

He saw it all at once. By the aid of the sene-

schal she had conjured the girl out of the castle. He bent upon her one of those malignant looks which no one could meet without a shudder. "Is it so?" he said. "That we shall see."

She trembled from head to foot under his eye.

"Cousin!" she exclaimed, as he turned to go, "no one in the castle, I swear it on this crucifix, knows aught of this matter but myself."

He looked at her again as he turned to go, and smiled, and again she trembled like a leaf.

"That, too, we shall see," he said, and left her.

She broke into piteous, terrified weeping, intermingled with prayers. Presently a messenger came to request her attendance in the great hall. She knew she must obey, and followed, entering by the door which opened on the raised part at the upper end, where were the two state chairs. The Graf rose from one and led her ceremoniously to the other, returning to his own. Wolfgang stood near. He had fallen into a frenzy of rage on learning that Rosilde was missing, and looked ready for any deed of ill. Below the dais stood several of the Graf's people, and Bärbele, white and scared, lifting beseeching eyes to her lady.

"What means this, kinsman? I told you no one but myself had meddled or made in the matter!" exclaimed the Freifrau, realising for the first time

how much reason Walther had had to fear for his grandchild. "The maiden is mine own attendant, and under my protection."

"She has taken part in stealing away my ward and kinswoman," answered the Graf, "and I will learn how much she knows of the matter."

"I have passed my word she knows nothing, and that should suffice," said the Freifrau, all the pride of her family flushing her pale face.

"I have told them I know nought, gracious lady, but they will not believe me," cried Barbara. "O my lord! it is true."

"That we shall presently see," said the Graf. "Would you have me believe, kinswoman, that the child went hence unknown to her maiden, who quits her neither by day nor night? Force me not to use means to learn the truth that you will scarce like to see."

"You will not put this affront on me in my own castle!" said the Freifrau, livid with anger and fear, and then, as she met his smile, she wrung her hands. "I cannot speak, do what you will. Oh, my poor girl, pardon me!"

"From my heart, madam," answered Barbara, white as her mistress, and equally resolute.

"Girl, I give thee yet time to bethink thee," said the Graf, and there was an ominous pause, but

Barbara had much of her grandfather's staunchness, and answered, "My lord, I cannot tell what I do not know."

"Let her be made to speak!" cried Wolfgang, who had with difficulty restrained himself until now. "Father, let her try how she likes the way my lady grandmother used to punish her maidens when they spun ill—tie flax round her hands, and set it on fire."

It was no unheard of punishment. The Graf nodded, and bade one of the men fetch flax and a brand. He heard the passionate reproaches and pleadings of Freifrau Faustina in absolute silence.

"It rests with you to spare her," he said, watching the flax wound round the girl's hands.

"Tell nothing, dear lady!" she cried, as she set her teeth to endure the pain, and looked unflinchingly at the lighted torch, while two men grasped her arms.

"First one hand, then the other, then both!" cried Wolfgang, all the instinct of cruelty awakening in him.

The flame caught and blazed. Freifrau Faustina covered her face with her hands. "Ah! Mary, Mother of Mercy, help!" she cried, as a sobbing moan escaped Barbara when the fire ran up the

flax, scorching as it ran, and Wolfgang laughed aloud.

"Now the other hand," he shouted, bending forward eagerly. "Wind the flax thicker, you dolts! Make her feel it!"

"That knights and gentlemen should see a poor girl tortured thus!" exclaimed Barbara. "Out upon you!"

"Hold," cried the Graf, suddenly, looking at the Freifrau. She was lying in a death-like swoon. The iron will had held out, but the frail nerves gave way. Forgetful of all but her mistress, Barbara started from the loosened grasp of her tormentors as the Graf lifted the cold hand which dropped again like that of a dead woman. "Malediction! the fiend is in it!" he muttered. "Here, girl, look to your lady; she must to her chamber."

"Are you going to let the wench go?" asked Wolfgang, in amazed and angry disappointment, as he saw her following the two men who carried out the fainting woman. "She has told nothing!"

"She has nought to tell; saw you not that all along?"

"Nought to tell!"

"Nought, you dull block. Yet could we but have worked on her mistress through her, all had

gone aright. Curses on the woman! if she die we may lose the clue."

"Is Bärbele not to be questioned further, then?" asked Wolfgang, with persistent and characteristic clinging to one idea.

"To what avail?"

"I like to see it; it pleases me to see her all white and shaking. I want to make her cry out and pray for mercy."

"Pah! What has the wench done to you?"

"Nothing," answered Wolfgang, with the sullen disappointment of a dog called off from worrying its victim.

The Graf turned away impatiently. He could look with perfect indifference on torture the most refined and exquisite when he had an end in view, but this brutal love of suffering he could only disdain. He went to learn if the Freifrau had revived, deeply regretting that he had so strained this feeble thread of life. Barbara was using with her uninjured hand all the few remedies within reach, but the Freifrau lay long as one dead. When she slowly revived and lifted bewildered eyes to Barbara, she seemed to have lost all recollection of what had occurred, but then slowly, and with tears gathering and falling, she whispered, "All is against me. I

promised to guard thee, and could not. It is an evil omen."

"Nay, dear lady, say not so; I am little the worse, and no more ill will befall me," said Barbara, cheerily. Shrewd enough to divine the Graf's policy, she had now little personal fear. "Only tell nothing," she added, in a rapid, low tone, with a look which made her mistress understand he might be near.

The Freifrau looked back to her and said no more. Barbara went into the outer room, and faced him undauntedly. "My lady must have a leech," she said, "I am no doctress, and she may die on my hands."

"One must be sent for," he answered, but with some perplexity, for not only did he want no tales carried out of the castle, but the distance from any town where a trustworthy leech could be found rendered the matter difficult. The science of medicine was in its infancy. Even highly esteemed physicians used methods old as the time of Galen and Hippocrates, and made one or two strong drugs serve for all diseases.

The Freifrau, listening intently, heard what was said, and feebly called Barbara. "No leech," she whispered, "a leech can do nothing for me, but if

the Graf have any mercy in him, let me not die without the last sacrament. Send for Father Philip."

"Say but where you have conveyed the child, and you shall have whom you will," he answered, advancing to her bed.

Two red spots came to her pallid cheeks; she rallied her strength.

"Never!" she said, in a clear, sharp voice.

"Then die without a priest!" he replied, turning away.

"The guilt be on you," she answered, and closed her eyes.

He ground his teeth in anger the more intense from being suppressed. What could he do with this dying creature, who baffled him by her very weakness? He felt sure that there had not been time to place Rosilde within the shelter of Rothenburg, and he had taken measures to intercept her on the way, but he would have given much to avoid a collision with the powerful religious house by laying his hand on her at once. It was also almost equally important to learn how she had been spirited out of the castle, and where Walther had fled: Walther, who must hold the secret of some way out, and if out then in too, and who, moreover, the Graf always felt, had strange thoughts about his master's death. These reflections made him return to the

bedside, and say less sternly, "I dare not deny the consolations of religion to one who deems herself a dying woman. The father shall be sent for."

She opened her eyes, which had a strange far away look in them, as if they already beheld earth from a great distance, but she made no answer at all. He spoke again, and then she made a sign of thanks, but weakness and suspicion combined to seal her lips. He withdrew to send off messengers.

"Does he mean it?" she asked, with eagerness which lent her a false strength, when sure he was gone.

"He means no good," said Barbara, sharply, but then repenting that she had discouraged her patient, she added, "Yet I see Hans mounting in the court, and Gerhardt too—I hope he will break his neck on the road," she added, looking at her smarting hand, which she had hastily bound up; "the rude churl held me as though he would crush my arm. Now, dear lady, drink this, and let me lay you more easily."

"No, no, I welcome pain and weariness as tokens of heavenly love most dear and precious. I would fain die on ashes, as holy men and women often have done—though holy I am not, alas!"

"My lady, if you would talk with Father Philip you must gather strength," said Barbara, sturdily.

"Would you let yourself die before you see the little Fräulein again? Ah, blessed be all the saints that she is out of the Junker's reach; he is crueller than a wild beast. How he laughed and rubbed his hands for joy when I blenched! I could have half killed myself for letting out that moan! Is there indeed nought I may know, gracious lady, nor do?" she added, with irrepressible curiosity, though well aware that her safety lay in ignorance.

"No, no; Walther knows what I would have done."

She lay so still through the night that again and again Barbara stooped over her to ascertain whether she still breathed, and each time there was the faint whisper, "Is Father Philip come?" Barbara made up her mind that she could not die until this heart's desire was satisfied, encouraged her, and got her to take a little food. Once or twice a singular, triumphant smile came on the pale lips, and she said "They have not found her!"

"No, madam, and they will not," Barbara answered, each time confidently.

Late in the next afternoon a leech arrived. If golden promises could have enabled him to cure his patient, the Graf did not spare them. He had not been long gone when Barbara espied a new-comer, a priest, and hastened to tell her lady the

welcome news. She raised herself and looked toward the door, with a look of that intense expectation which strains the very soul. The Graf's step was heard as well as that of the priest. They had had a short, weighty conference as they passed through the court, and they paused before entering the antechamber.

"You understand?" the Graf said, in a low voice.

"Yes, my lord, but I dare reveal nothing told under the seal of confession," answered his companion, an old ally, who had served him well more than once, but now looked pale and uneasy. "You do not know the penalties of such a sin."

"Are confessions never *used* later?" said the Graf; "are things never said by a penitent *after* confessions are made?"

"That may be brought about, perchance, and it were not well that Rothenburg, already so rich and overbearing, won such a prize," said the priest of another monastery. He entered the sick chamber.

"Father! Ah, it is not Father Philip!" said the Freifrau, with a cry of exceeding disappointment.

"No, my daughter, the good father is sick, and I have been sent to take his place," he answered.

Tears rolled down her cheeks, and she lay speechless and exhausted, while his exhortations

fell on her weary ears. Barbara withdrew, full of suspicion and dislike to this stranger, whose looks greatly displeased her. She did not credit a word of Father Philip's illness; did not think that Hans had been to Rothenburg at all. She fully believed this man would reveal to the Graf whatever the Freifrau told him. But there she was wrong. The tremendous sanctity of the confessional overawed even such an ecclesiastic as this; he was only bent on learning what he wanted outside of that seal. A little comfort came to Faustina in his presence. Though not Father Philip he was yet a priest, and had the awful, indefeasible powers of his order. Few yet doubted that the keys of heaven, hell, and purgatory were in the hands of the priesthood; even after death the soul was yet within their reach; they were lords over the universal conscience; absolution and Holy Eucharist were theirs to give or withhold; the noblest laymen must bow down before even an ecclesiastic like this priest—venal, sensual, half an atheist, yet master over his soul. Freifrau Faustina looked through the man to his office, but in her tale of self-accusation and self-torture, though she dwelt on her vow for her child, and her struggle to keep it, she said no word of what he most desired to hear. He gave her absolution, and the last rites of the dying should have followed, but he paused.

"My daughter," he said, "have you no care still weighing on your mind? No one whom you would commend to my prayers?"

"Yes—my only child. Pray for her."

"You count to place her at Rothenburg."

"Yes."

"She is not there yet then?"

"Not yet—but soon—soon—I hope and believe."

"Are you sure she is in safe hands?"

"I think so. Yes, I am sure of it."

"This is a very grave matter, daughter. It must be swiftly and secretly carried out, if you would not embroil the sisterhood with the mighty ones of the earth."

"I had not thought of that," she said, startled. It had already troubled her that the execution of the scheme depended alone on Walther, and he a fugitive, and obliged to keep in close concealment.

"At least, you have trusted one sure to place the child safely in the hands of the convent?"

"I—know not," she answered, a sudden terror awakening at the recollection that Walther had looked with little favour on Rosilde's taking the veil.

"How! But then you are solemnly bound to

take further means," said the priest, severely. "Would you risk failing to keep your vow?"

"Alas! What can I do more?"

"If a humble priest can aid you, call upon me, lady. Sore sin it were not to take all means to fulfil a vow so great and solemn, and touching Rothenburg so nearly."

A long, sobbing sigh was the answer. His urgency and warnings chimed in but too well with the suggestions of her own heart for her to dare resist, though she would have endured in dumb obstinacy anything that the Graf could have inflicted.

"I will tell you," she faltered, "a holy man would not betray me, and yet—O blessed Mary! do I well?"

"Speak, my daughter," he said, and bent nearer to listen. A loud shout arose in the castle court. She started up in her bed. There was a second shout.

"They have found her!" she shrieked. The priest ran to look out, while she sat rigid with terror and expectation. He turned round, with a vexed and disconcerted air. "It is but some of the men wrestling in sport," he said. The string of the rosary, twisted convulsively in her hands, snapped suddenly; the heavy crucifix fell to the ground,

and the beads pattered far and wide over the oaken floor. Barbara in the anteroom heard it, and came in.

“What is it? did you call, noble lady?” she asked, looking at the white face which had dropped back on the pillows. “Herrje! she is dead.”

CHAPTER XI.

FOR a day or two the novelty of her surroundings amused and contented the little Dornröschen, and Hildemund's reverent and courteous behaviour to this fugitive princess was a delightful contrast to the treatment she met with at Wolfgang's hands. As long as he was at home, devoted to her, she was satisfied, but when he went on a journey with his books, she found it dull, and longed for Barbara, and the spacious castle hall and court, and all the stir among its inhabitants. Frau Magdalene had no easy charge in the wilful, high-spirited child, who did not acknowledge her authority, and would not learn any occupation. A climax came when Magdalene refused to take her into the forest, because she expected a poor sick peasant, whose arm she dressed several times a week.

"You cannot take me because a peasant is coming? You put me aside for a serf?" Rosilde exclaimed, opening her great eyes wide. "Put me aside for a serf! But I am the Freifräulein, and I will go."

"Know you not who said that even the heir, so long as he is a child, owes duty and submission to parents and guardians?" asked Frau Dahn.

"No, that I know nothing of. All heed me at Burgstein, and I will not be thwarted here. I will go back, if you thwart me, and talk to me of what some churl or serf has said."

"Churl or serf! Child, did you never hear of holy Paul?"

"Who was he?" asked Rosilde, a little impressed by the look and tone. "Was he knight or priest?"

"A soldier of soldiers, maiden; one who feared neither wild waters, nor fell beast, nor fiercer man, in fighting for his Master."

"Tell me about him."

And Magdalene, at once glad to divert the child's thoughts, and scandalised by her ignorance, began to tell the Apostle's history, Rosilde listening attentively, with increasing respect and interest, until she heard of his labouring with his hands. The spell snapped at once.

"Said I not so!" she cried, starting up indignantly, "he *was* a base craftsman. I do not want to hear any more; I will not listen. Let me go, I say. I will go home to the castle. If my

father were here he would make you dearly abye your saucy words to me!"

"Nay, if you are so froward, you must stay in my chamber until you bear yourself more seemingly, my young mistress," said Magdalene, who, with all her calm gentleness, leaned to wholesome discipline, and was only withheld by the universal reverence for noble birth from feeling herself obliged to administer chastisement to the rebel who stood stamping her little feet and regarding her with flashing eyes. "Go up thither, and let me not see you until you repent yourself."

She was not at all sure that she was not culpably lenient in taking no severer measure, yet her heart yearned over the child, so untrained and untaught, except in the claims of her birth and station.

Rosilde looked at her, gave her little head a backward fling, and walked proudly out at the door and up the outside staircase, and Magdalene remained alone, more ruffled than she could have believed possible. She sat musing while she span. What would be the outcome of this dangerous charge? What chance was there of any harmless solution to this perplexity? She fell back on her habitual thought, that where no light shone on her path, her strength was to sit still; and, accustomed

as she was to sit alone and think, she lost count of time and forgot the child, until a figure appeared in the doorway, and she saw Barbara standing there with the bird, which Hildemund had tamed for the little Burgfräulein, in a cage. With consternation she thought that Rosilde would hear the well-known voice and rush down. But she did not come. Magdalene could only ask Barbara in, and bid her seat herself, asking after her lady.

"She died yesterday," answered the girl.

"How!" exclaimed Magdalene, greatly shocked.

Then Barbara told her tale, and how the Freifrau had been buried with scant ceremony as soon as possible, the priest who had shriven her performing the service, and then, no one seeking to detain her, Barbara had quitted the castle, to seek her father and mother, who dwelt in the village. "I would not leave the bird my little lady held so dear," she said, "and I have brought it here, for Kurre Murre, our cat, will make but a mouthful of it, if I take it home. Alack! I would I knew my little mistress were safe, too! But we all think she is in Kloster Rothenburg. The Graf has ridden out himself, doubtless to seek her. May he never come back." The story took long to tell; Magdalene heard it with deep and troubled interest. When it was told, she had to look at Barbara's hand, and

dress it, and much time elapsed before she was alone again, and had leisure to wonder where Rosilde could be. She went to seek her, but the room was empty, and the bird had flown.

For a while this indignant little captive had sat full of displeasure, with a half-formed purpose of escaping to the castle, but she did not well know what direction to take, and Walther's warnings had sunk deeply into her mind. She looked out and saw two squirrels chasing each other in a tree, and laughed in sudden delight; all her childish anger was gone, like a cloud absorbed by the sun into blue air. They disappeared after a while, and she leant listlessly against the open window, and was asking herself if she should go down to Frau Dahn, when the familiar dress and figure of Barbara appeared at the edge of the rocky platform. Leaning out in an ecstasy of delight she waited to call her and make her look up with a start, until she should pass below, and that brief pause gave her time to recollect her promise never to show herself to anyone who might come. "Not to Bärbele?" she had asked, and Walther had said "No; it might bring ill on poor Bärbele." And she had plighted her word—Walther had told her it was as base of a girl as for a knight to break it, and that no Burgstein could possibly do such a thing. Tears

brimmed over; the struggle was a very hard one in the little breast.

"And Bärbele has my Dompfaff!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I do want to see her and my bird!"

She had regretted her Dompfaff many times, and its presence made the effort to keep her promise heroic.

"I cannot stay here if I must not go to them," the little maiden exclaimed, after waiting a while in the hope of being summoned. "I shall go and pick berries in the forest, where Hildemund got them for me."

She had forgotten Magdalene's orders to stay where she was, and only looked on her flight as a means to avoid breaking her word. Had not the two within the house been absorbed in conversation they would have heard the little feet patter down the staircase, and seen the childish form flit past the door and over the open ground into the forest.

She lost her way at once, but, as she found berries like those which Hildemund had picked, she did not discover this, and went on and on, fancying she was returning to the Bannwart's dwelling, while ever going further from it; now going along a glade, now pushing her way through the bushes, then following a narrow path, coming out

at length on the edge of a precipitous wooded ravine, with a stream flowing below, and a stretch of green turf along it. She was above the Eschthal, and exactly opposite the spot where her father had dropped dead from the cast of Kunz's boarspear.

The loneliness of the place seemed to strike her. She stood still, and looked about with a frightened air. A little movement close by made her look down, and the pretty child-smile came back as she saw a hare erecting its long ears and looking at her. It was strangely tame, for though it would not let her touch it, it only ran a little way and then stopped. She followed, holding to roots and branches, and finding a sort of rough path which led down to the valley. When she got to the bottom the hare ran on and vanished in a cave. She would have followed, but stopped awe struck, yet enchanted, at the dark mouth, listening. The sweetest of voices was singing within, to the accompaniment of a zither, and the walls gave back the notes with the marvellous, countless, magic echoes of which some Thuringian caves have the secret. It seemed as if a choir of voices were singing. Rosilde at once made up her mind they were angels. She was a daring child, and strong curiosity prompted her to go on into the gloom.

She went a little way in, turned a corner of rock, and stood amazed, unnoticed by the only occupant of the cave. No daylight entered here; but, illuminated by a lamp, the walls of a lofty cave glittered with a myriad points of dazzling light; crystal stalactites hung from the roof, clear and shining as the purest diamonds, and where little drops of water had gathered and hung they shone with rainbow colours. There were tokens of habitation in the cave. A chest stood in a dark corner, with a long wooden ladle, a bowl, and a Lazarus-rattle upon it. The cask was placed near in which alone a leper might receive anything which he procured; but besides these things—the ordinary, few possessions of every leper, which he bore with him into his solitude—parchment and a red pen lay on a flat rock serving as table, over which the lamp was fixed, and beside it, sitting on a bed or carpet made of deerskin, was, as Rosilde fully believed, an angel, singing and playing on a zither. Although instead of brilliant robes and peacock wings he wore a black garment and was barefoot, she thought he must be one of those whom she had often looked at in the windows of the castle chapel, or perhaps the beautiful being in the painting at the Bannwart's cottage. To other eyes he would have only seemed a young man with a singularly refined and sweet

expression, and something of both clerk and knight in his air. He had taken off the mufflings, without which he was by law forbidden to stir abroad; and either the fell disease had not attacked his face and hands, or, what was more probable, he was smitten, not with the loathsome malady of Eastern leprosy, but one of those numerous others which the ignorance of the middle ages fatally classed with it as equally contagious and incurable. This was the more likely, that far from having the hoarse and inarticulate voice of the leper, he spoke, as well as sang, with clear and cultivated tones. He sprang up in consternation when his eyes fell on Rosilde. "Ah, child! what do you here? Tarry not; go hence."

"Alas! I meant no ill," she faltered, backing, much alarmed as he rose. "Oh, do not harm me!"

She dropped on her knees and put her hands together, as she did to pray.

"Nay, not willingly, little maid," he said, sadly; "but if you linger I may perchance do so against my will. Wait for me without."

She obeyed instantly, and he hastily assumed his wrappings and emerged, standing at some distance to leeward of her, as the law required of a leper who held converse with anyone, lest his very breath should carry infection. She had never seen

a leper, common though the disease was; the strange disguise, the copper girdle, the Lazarus-rattle, had no repulsive associations for her. Her arrival and her looks of wonder, awe, and admiration, were equally strange to him.

"Child, who are you? whence come you?" he asked, looking at her as she stood there, in the dress which Magdalene had made for her, such as the well-to-do burghers wore, but with a certain air which did not accord with it.

"Do you not know?" she asked, in surprise that an angel should be ignorant of anything. "I am—Dornröschen."

She recollected her promise, and kept it, though doubtful whether in the present case she did right.

"The little Fräulein! Rosilde von Burgstein!" he exclaimed, with sudden interest, in a tone in which there was a touch of tenderness.

"They call me Dornröschen now, because, you know, I am in hiding," she answered, with a childish importance and dignity which made him smile. "Walther took me in the night to Frau Dahn, and he wanted me to call her *Muhme*; but we are not really of kin, for I am noble."

"Truly I think her nobler than any ancient name could make her," said Ulfric; "and methinks she should find you very thankful and obedient."

Rosilde drooped her head, and he smiled again as he saw that his arrow had hit the mark.

"None are so noble as they who do noble deeds," he added. "But how came you so far away from shelter?"

"I lost my way, and then the hare—— Ah, there it is!" she cried, too much pleased not to forget her awe, as the brown creature came running to Ulfic's feet. Protected by his presence it let her take it in her arms, and a feeling of pleasure, and almost of gladness, such as he had not known for years, came over him as he saw the pretty child, to whom he appeared no object of horror or repulsion, hold the little creature, which he had tamed and loved, in her arms.

"And then I heard you singing," she said, shyly, dropping her voice as if doubtful how he would take it; "and all the others singing too."

He thought she meant the echoes. "They answer me sweetly," he said; "but now, little Fräulein, you must return to good Frau Dahn, and wander no more thus perilously. What if the Graf came this way? or Kunz? Where is Hildemund?"

"He knows Hildemund," she thought, and answered: "Gone with his pack since yesterday. May I not come again?"

"I—I know not. Ask Frau Dahn," he said, with a keen pang; "they will know what is best."

"I will be good," she said, wistfully, and there was a smile in his voice, though he had not read her thought.

"Strive to be so all you can, my little one; then will yours be a double nobility. Now I will show you the way back."

She reluctantly put the hare down, and climbed the steep, rugged way to the high land overhead. Her eyes dwelt on her guide. "Do you wear these weeds that people may not know who you are?" she asked.

"Truly, I would not that any knew me!" he answered, almost harshly. "Child, how came you on that thought?"

She hung her head, but presently glanced up to ask: "Will you tell me if you are St. Raphael, or St. Michael?"

"What mean you? My name is Ulfric."

"I did not know that was an angel's name."

"Child, for what do you take me?"

"Are you not an angel?" she asked, and was startled to hear his laugh, less startled perhaps than he, for he did not know he could still laugh. It was laughter that turned to bitterness as he thought of the contrast between her fancy and the pitiless

reality. It would be hard to describe the mingled feelings which awoke in his breast—pain, pleasure, a startled sense that after all he had not utterly lost all connection with the world of living men, and an indescribable yearning to retain this child near him, who had no fear of him, felt no repulsion at the sight of him. Frau Magdalene and Hildemund were kind, true friends; but they were fully conscious of his condition. This child knew it not, and did not wound him either by compassion or aversion. She was just as much convinced that he was an angel as ever. "He never *said* he was not," she was thinking.

"Ah, there is the house!" she exclaimed presently, "and Frau Magdalene. She is looking the other way; she does not see us."

Rosilde ran on a few steps, and then looked back for her guide. He had vanished. That he had merely withdrawn into the forest did not occur to her; she supposed he was able to come and go unseen. Magdalene turned and saw her.

"Maiden," she said, much relieved, yet with grave displeasure; "how is this? Is it thus you obey me?"

"I did obey," answered Rosilde, hotly; but, mindful of Ulfric's words, she added in another tone: "I saw Bärbele, and I put my hands over my ears not

to hear her voice, but I had to go away; I did so want to see her. Did she leave my Dompfaff?"

"Is this wherefore you ran away into the forest?" asked Magdalene, astonished.

"Yes, because I had promised."

Magdalene had the rare gift of knowing when to trust implicitly. "You have kept your word as a noble maiden should, dear child," she said, colouring with glad pleasure; "it was a hard trial. But do not thus again. Think if you had met the Graf!"

"*He* said that," thought Rosilde, impressed by the coincidence, though she only asked, "Did Bärbele leave my bird? Is she coming again? Am I to go home?"

Magdalene had to tell her of her mother's death, somewhat fearing the effect, for she had evidently greatly pined for her father, but she listened silently; surprise seemed her prevailing feeling.

"You will not send me back to Wolfgang?" she asked, anxiously.

Reassured on that point she sat playing with her bird, much less turbulently than usual, and seemed thinking. Magdalene wondered if she understood what had happened. She did not say a word about her visit to the Eschthal. It was her own wondrous, delightful secret, to be shared with no one, unless some day with Hildemund. Only she perplexed

Magdalene by asking if there were an angel called Ulfric, and when told she knew of none so named, she said, "Perchance there is one you have not heard of, then," and would give no further explanation. But she called Frau Dahn "Muhme" when she addressed her, and put her little mouth up to be kissed when laid in her bed that night, a thing which she had never before done.

CHAPTER XII.

PFARRER BASIL had not revisited the Bannwart's house. Certain new writings of Luther's had reached him, and raised a storm within him which had driven him to put forth a vehement reply, and to preach a discourse so full of passionate denunciation that Magdalene, who was one of his audience, listened with grieved disapproval, and went homeward with Hildemund in expressive silence. It was a time when justice and courtesy to opponents was almost unknown, whether a von Hutten were assailing a Duke of Württemberg with every weapon which calumny and personal hatred could forge, or a Scaliger accusing an Erasmus, and receiving his missiles flung back barbed with bitter jests at his own head.

But to the serene and lofty spirit of Magdalene this was grievous and abhorrent. "I fear me this Prediger Basil is but a blind leader of the blind," she said at last. "He counts unity more precious than truth; yet unity cannot be where truth is not, for she alone is one."

Magdalene could not make allowances for a nature like that of Herr Basil, possessed as it were by several spirits, and ever at war with itself. Hardly had he launched forth his reply and preached his sermon, than the revulsion came, the terrible doubt whether he had done well. Her surprise was indescribable when, only a day or two later, he stood in her doorway and said, with no greeting or explanation, "Where be those writings whereof you spake that time I came hither? I would read them."

Magdalene looked at him in wonder, so abrupt and sharpened by inward conflict was the tone, so pale and distraught his looks.

"They are here, dear sir," she answered; and her voice, calm but full of gentle sympathy, seemed to soothe his mood at once. "Take what you will; but, if I may counsel, I would you would first read this little book." She had chosen the "Theologia Germanica"—"written by one whose name man knows not, but surely it is written in the Book of Life. Unadorned the book is with words of human wisdom, yet rare and precious to the soul."

"The thought of these writings will not leave me," he said, putting it hastily into his breast. "It is as if a voice—*his* voice—bid me take and study

them; and though I would not listen to him while he lived—alas, my brother, my brother!—I have no courage to harden myself against him now.”

And meeting the pitying question in her eyes he continued, in hurried and broken sentences: “I had a friend—a friend dear as mine own soul; we walked together, and took sweet counsel in heavenly things; and he was to me all that the best, the noblest, purest of men could be. That he could go astray . . . sooner had I believed that a saint in Paradise, an angel from heaven could err. And yet he—he, my friend, my guide—there came a time when he spake and taught things that Holy Church disallows, and I found myself no longer one with him, nay, opposed in hot displeasure—the hotter that I loved him with all the love of my heart; and thenceforward we were not one but twain. My God! to think of Bernhard as one who misled the people, who had the guilt of souls upon his head! who died—for he died—excommunicated, shut in the blackness of hell for ever! Prayer and mass availing nought! Purgatory itself closed against him! my friend whom my soul loved, and loves yet.”

“And even if he were such a sinner as you deem, dear sir, does not God who created him love him more than you can?” asked Magdalene, with joyful certainty.

"Have I not told you he died under the ban of the Church?"

"Yet may he be one of the Church invisible," said Magdalene, steadily, though well aware how startling her words were. "Only the dear God knows who belongs thereunto. What said the great master of Florence? 'None can close the Church triumphant against me, for the key thereof belongs not to man.'"

"Frau, it is not thus that the Church teaches."

"Yet it is truth," she answered, in the same and confident tone. "Well said good Master Tauler, 'Whoever is unjustly excommunicated, his condemnation becomes pardon before God.'"

"Would I knew it were so with Bernhard, the other half of my soul! Deep, in truth, and wide must be the gulf between the living and the dead; since no heart agony, no prayer, nor penance can bridge it, nor obtain any sign where his spirit is! Is there any anguish I would not hail, as never did I yet any mercy, could it win me a token from him! Why if saints—nay, if the layman Bernilo—were permitted to visit hell, and return to warn men of its torments, and Alberic of Monte Casino saw in vision the souls in purgatory, may it not be mine to see with these eyes where that dear soul dwells; and, it may be, by tears, and prayer in mass, to

shorten his penance, unless indeed he be so lost that no sacrifice or intercession avail," said Pfarrer Basil, with agony in his quivering voice.

"Trust him with God," said Magdalene, softly.

"Is his soul so far hence that he knows nothing of my tears, or so wrapt in penal fires that no cry can pierce through?" he went on, unheeding.

"Nay, reverend sir, think not so. Rather believe that when you meet he will tell you that many a time it has been permitted him to stand near and speak counsel or comfort, although you knew not it came from him. So is it with me and my dear husband, that I know right well."

Her eyes were full of lovely light; there was a tender, tremulous smile on her lips. He looked at her with a wistful longing in his face.

"Your thoughts are like his," he said; "they came to mine ear with a strangely familiar sound the first time I entered this dwelling. It may be I am but yielding to temptation; yet read these books which he loved I must, though I fear it is sin, and hitherto I have ever refused to know aught of them or their writers."

"Nay, read without fear, dear sir; it may well be that your friend's voice will speak through them, only be willing to hear and obey the inward light."

"These last writings of the monk of Wittenberg

called all back to me," he said, as if his thoughts had suddenly taken a new turn. "It seemed to me they were snares laid by the Tempter himself; yet scarce had I denounced them ere I feared I had done ill."

Her silence answered.

"So think you too? Yet how can you judge the matter?" he said, with the impatience of disapproval ever strong in him.

"It is not for me to judge," she said. "Rather would I ask your counsel, in strictest secrecy, as to a matter which touches me nearly, yet is too hard for me."

He had vaguely heard of the disappearance of the little Burgfräulein, which indeed had filled the valley with rumours; but had concerned himself little about it, supposing her at Rothenburg. Following what Magdalene now said, with Kunz's confession in his mind, he perceived, though she did not put it into plain words, that in some way she must have learned the facts of the Freiherr's death.

"A right perilous charge, Frau. You would place her elsewhere?"

"I see no other refuge, reverend sir."

"Wherefore not Rothenburg, as her mother willed?"

"But her father did not," said Magdalene.

"There is no need wherefore she should take the veil were she placed there."

"Think you they would shelter her but with that thought?"

He knew they would not. For no less a price would the convent undertake the struggle with von Lichtenberg.

"Methinks she must abide here until Walther claims her, who placed her in my keeping; and though she be a wayward child and a haughty, she is a sweet one too, and I were loth to part with her," said Magdalene.

"I would see her," said Pfarrer Basil.

Frau Dahn fetched her, and she made the deep and respectful obeisance to the priest which she had been carefully taught to make to Father Philip. Soon, however, she was standing at his knee, fearless and happy. He had an irresistible attraction for little children.

"Take me into the forest, and I will show you my secret," she whispered. He smiled, and asked Magdalene if there were danger in taking her with him.

"Danger everywhere, but no more there than here, if you keep the wood paths," she answered; and presently the two were walking together under the trees.

"Where are you taking me, little maid?" he asked.

"I have something to show you; I do not think he will be angry, as you are a priest; but you must tell no one. I think he lives always in the cave, because I saw a chest and a staff and other things there, and he has not wings, or else he hides them."

Pfarrer Basil had to make what he could out of her story. So convinced was she of having seen a heavenly messenger that he was inclined to believe her. The temper of the time was to cultivate implicit belief in the miraculous, and discourage investigation. With some minds the effect was to suggest scepticism, but not with Pfarrer Basil's. The child had an admirable memory for locality; she retraced her steps easily through the wood-ways, and brought him out just where she had emerged herself, above the Eschthal. "Hush! Listen!" she said, with a finger on her lips. But no one was singing now.

"Let us go down and look for him," she said, disappointed.

"Down this cliff? Child, I think you aim to break my neck," he said, with a smile. The childish prattle and the forest solitude were balm to his weary and tortured spirit. He followed his little

guide as best he could. "Stop!" she said, suddenly, lifting an imperious hand. "There it is! Listen!"

"No angel that, though truly the voice is sweet enough to mislead you, little maid," said Pfarrer Basil, amused yet disappointed. "I heard that song ere I came here, sung by a fair dame at Fulda, and again, as I left the Bishop's palace, by a market woman in the street. It hath bewitched the 'folk, I think. But though in the heavenly courts love reign, they sing not such songs as this. 'Tis of earth! Hearst thou? Each verse ends alike—'ich liebe, du liebest, wir lieben.'"

"'Ich liebe, du liebest, wir lieben,'" she repeated, murmuring the sweet notes of this graceful and sportive love song, which, as Pfarrer Basil said, had taken fast hold of popular fancy. "Come! he has ceased."

Still a little excited by interest and expectation, Herr Basil followed the little active feet down the cliff as best he might, not without clinging more than once to bush or branch to hinder a slip or a fall. She stood full of eagerness waiting for him below. He reached her side almost at the same moment as the occupant of the cave, unaware that anyone had invaded his solitude, emerged from it. With a half-smothered cry the priest recoiled. A leper! Rosilde's angel, the singer of the love song,

a leper! At all times disease and deformity were so abhorrent to his sensitive nature that it was only by the strongest effort he brought himself to face them. Now, taken unawares, all the repulsion inspired by the sight of this stricken outcast spoke in look and gesture. He started back with a movement as if he would have caught the wondering child out of sight and reach. "Wretch! hast thou touched her?" he exclaimed.

"Hold!" said Ulfric, with a tone so full of dignity and profound reproach that the priest stood rebuked. "I would harm her as little as yourself. Little one, go yonder and pluck a nosegay of those flowers; thou wilt perchance find the hare there."

He pointed to the stream, along which there was a beautiful broad belt of azure forget-me-not, and she readily obeyed. Then turning to Pfarrer Basil he said in the same severe and reproachful tone, "Would you teach the only creature who for eight long years has looked on me with neither pity nor loathing to shrink from me? You, a minister of Him who healed lepers!"

The reproach went home, and Pfarrer Basil was conscience-stricken; but then, lifting his head, he exclaimed, "Those you speak of knew their miserable estate; they sang not idle love songs, but knew themselves smitten for their sins, vile and outcast."

"Aye so! And how would you say if you knew that the leper who sang these songs made them also?"

"How say you? You! You! Can it be a leper to whom the gift is given to send forth those sweet words which have gone to the very heart of the people? which are the joy of the glad, the comfort of the sick in body and heart, nay, which dwell on the lips of the dying?"

"Is it so?" said Ulfric, and the deep thrill in his voice told how greatly he was moved. "Hildegund indeed hath told me this, but I knew 'not if I dared believe it. Yes, it is a leper who frames these songs, and hearing this I thank thee, O God, who hast given me the power to comfort others. Verily I should know how to speak to sick hearts, for I have greatly suffered, and therefore I can speak to those who suffer too, for if I dare say it, before any can open the kingdom of heaven to another, he must first have overcome the sharpness of death himself."

A deep blush of shame and contrition came to the face of Pfarrer Basil. "'Who comforteth us that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble by the exhortation wherewith we ourselves are exhorted of God,'" he involuntarily repeated, as the words of the Vulgate rose to his mind. "Lord,

pardon my hardness and blindness of heart! I have sinned, inasmuch as I have held one of Thine own people smitten of Thy displeasure, when rather Thou hast chastised him as a dear son, and out of his stripes consolation has come for many others. It is, then, from your lips, my brother, that have flowed our 'Five little Springs'?"

He alluded to a hymn which had already become known far and wide as the "Fünf Brünnelein," and which is still sung by many who have never heard "of that poor clerk who sat desolate," as says the old Limburg Chronicle, "while all Germany sang his songs."

"It is so, father."

Pfarrer Basil stood lost in thought. It seemed to him unutterably pathetic when he recalled the gay and noble lips which loved to repeat the songs of this man, while he moved dead among the living.

"You should be a clerk," he said abruptly.

"I was bred a scholar."

"And surely of no mean house?"

"Would any to whom I once belonged have me name myself?" he answered bitterly.

"Some friends you surely have?"

Pfarrer Basil could not believe that this man was one of the wretched fraternity who lived by charity,

cast from hasty hands and with averted eyes. There were lepers of all ranks, and some had property, of which they were permitted the use, though they could neither bequeath nor inherit, since legally they were dead. Ulfric must surely be one of these.

"Friends? Yes, two. Hildemund Dahn and his mother."

"Ah, truly, you have good friends there. Yet what can even they do?"

It escaped Pfarrer Basil unawares, and he repented keenly of his words as Ulfric replied, with indescribable bitterness, "What, indeed! I know not how, dashed from heaven to hell almost in a day, eight years ago, home, hopes, future gone all together, only a miserable life that I might not take left me—I know not how I have endured until now. All life fair before me, in the brightness of my twenty-two years, then, almost before a thought of dread had entered, an outcast, the burial service read over me, the earth flung on my feet, the leper's robe put on—and I was unclean to the very mother who bare me! free among the dead, cut off for ever from the living, and yet alive—yet alive! My God, what have I done, what had my forefathers done, that this thing should come upon me?"

That exceeding bitter cry rang long in Pfarrer

Basil's ears. "Brother," he said, with tears welling to his eyes, "in the sight of Him who chose you to bear this heavy cross with Him you are cleaner than many whom the world counts marked as His chosen. It is when men sit in darkness and the shadow of death that they best hear His voice, if only they lose not heart, and listen. What shall I say? I am not worthy to speak to one so proved and tried. My words bruise when most I would heal!"

"Nay, not so. But the child comes again. I would not see dread or compassion in those sweet eyes. Little one, you have found your playfellow? The wild creatures fear me not," he added to Pfarrer Basil. "They count me not as of kin to their enemies. The little birds come at my call and eat of the crumbs I throw them, and it harms them not," he added hastily, "and timid things which flee from sight or sound are tame with me. The leveret which hides yonder because she sees you, father, scarce leaves my side when I am alone. They take no harm from me, and I am the less desolate for their friendship."

Rosilde was listening in perplexity. "Is this not, then, an angel?" she whispered to Pfarrer Basil.

"Better yet, my maiden; one whom the dear Lord has chosen to carry a great cross. Brother, I

may not linger, for I must take this little one home, but I will come again soon. Much might I learn from you, so God give me grace. Give me your blessing."

"Mine!" said Ulfric, in extreme surprise, and then understanding the tender, humble nature of this man, at once so impulsive and so loving, he said, "Peace and blessing be with you, my father; the thought of you will abide comfortably with me."

Pfarrer Basil drooped his head, full of self-rebuke. He felt as if in his first scorn of this poor leper, he had scorned his Master Himself. He took a sad and humbled heart back to his dwelling, and knelt long in penitent prayer before the altar of his church, yet the pain was less sharp and more wholesome than that which had driven him forth in the morning.

But when Ulfric had watched him and his little charge out of sight, such a wave of overpowering anguish swept over him that he flung his hands up to heaven, and then cast himself down prostrate on the rocky floor of his dwelling with a cry like one drowning in deep waters. "My God, my God!" broke from his lips, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HILDEMUND had pushed further afield with his books than usual, and noted that they were increasingly bought. The stir in religious matters was growing very great; art, literature, and daily life all were becoming affected by the progress of the Reformation, and the priestly rule over body and soul was rudely shaken by it. A shudder of alarm ran through the cloisters of Germany, and here and there persecution burst forth, and heretics were tortured and beheaded. Many leading men came over to the cause of reform—some out of deep and honest conviction, others to gain worldly advantages. Already politics were fatally mixed up with the movement, and heavily clogging the march of the Reformation; and already, in spite of the Reformers setting their faces against communism, and Luther's strong declaration that the Gospel set souls free, but did not divide lands and goods, the peasants showed signs of deep discontent and disposition to seize on the domains which they cultivated. Hillemund had opportunities of marking all this, the

more keenly that his eyes had been opened by the assembly in the forest. M \ddot{u} nzer's name was beginning to be heard as that of a wild and visionary fanatic who had not absolutely founded the blasphemous sect of Anabaptists, but flung himself so entirely into it that his name became even more closely associated with it than that of the other "Prophets of Zwickau." Hildemund was thinking over these things on his homeward way, when his reflections were interrupted by a beggar, carrying the double wallet and a board, with images of St. Anna and Our Lady of Einsiedeln, his patronesses. He held out a broad, muscular hand for a dole, rather as if it were a right than an alms, and indeed gifts to these licensed mendicants had come to be so considered. They levied a heavy tax on rich and poor, getting least perhaps at monasteries, whose occupants possibly thought their salvation sufficiently secure without furthering it by alms-giving, and it was a general complaint in Germany that not only had bishops and abbots become powerful temporal princes, quite neglecting their spiritual duties, but that the convents no longer assisted the poor, although it was with that view that many were chiefly supposed to exist.

As Hildemund put a coin into the man's hand, silently recognising a face which he had seen at the

Wünschthurm, the beggar observed, "You have friends in Marienau."

"Not I. They do not buy my wares there. They are Bündisch and Roman to the backbone."

"They give as little as they buy, plague take them! But a monk put a silver piece into my hand—'tis the first time I ever saw the shape of one there—and bade me seek you to tell you to hold fast that you have."

"I understand you not," said Hildemund, looking inquiringly at him.

"Nay, I have no more to tell you. My errand is done. Fare you well."

"Stay—yet, one moment!" cried Hildemund; "know you how the Prior of Marienau was called in the world?"

"Aye, for sure," said the beggar, who like all his fraternity knew the history and genealogy of every one of any note for thirty miles round and more, "his name in the world was Thomas von Rosenthal."

It was a flash of light, and the shrewd beggar saw it, though Hildemund only said, "I never had speech with e'er a one of them all but the porter, who would not so much as let me enter. Saw you none but the monk who gave you the message?"

"None to speak to; no layman nor any monk

that I knew. I must jog on; charity grows cold and scarce, and my wallets fill slowly."

Hildemund laughed, for they looked well rounded.

"'Tis an evil time," said the beggar, shaking his matted head; "know you not the prophecy, who in 1523 dies not of plague, and in 1524 dies not of water, and in 1525 is not slain of the sword, is luckiest of men?"

"Yes, 'tis in all men's mouths."

"Aye, and 1525 is at hand. Our Lady and St. Anna keep you."

"Farewell," said Hildemund, and they parted.

The name of Rosenthal, that of the late Freifrau's family, assured him that the message came from Walther, doubtless in hiding at Marienau. So Dornröschen was to remain where she had found a home. He was delighted. The very peril of the charge had its charm, and the thought of parting with her grew daily more unwelcome. Magdalene understood the message in the same way, and saw that Rosilde must remain with them until better times, little likely apparently to come. Each day, however, made her more hopeful that at least no one would suspect where the child had found shelter. Graf Lichtenberg had moved heaven and earth to find her, but he had looked too far afield. He had

now quitted Burgstein, leaving Wolfgang as nominal master, with Kunz under him, and really responsible for the keeping of the castle, while the Graf went to secure his rights over it in the absence of any other heir. The League were well contented that the Württemberg estates should be in hands so loyal to them, and he had a firm friend in the ruthless George von Waldberg, or Truchsess, as he was usually called, from the high office hereditary in his family. He it was who had organised the ambush to take Ulrich; and all his influence with the League and the Bishop of Würzburg was at the service of von Lichtenberg.

From Würzburg the Graf went on to Italy, on an important imperial mission. Fortune was at that moment shining on Francis I., and Charles V. had need to rally all his friends and allies in Italy. It was a welcome mission, not only from the political importance it gave the Graf, but because it took him into an atmosphere congenial to him. He had at one time lived long in Italy, and it suited him. He liked the cultivated sunny life; he was at his ease in a country where men, when it suited them, could do fiendish things, and yet neither be fiends nor be thought so, but return to their usual ways when they would, without anyone so much as lifting an eyebrow in surprise or indignation. He breathed

more freely where the standard of immorality was high. His own countrymen had a straightforward blundering sincerity, which made them perfectly well aware when they committed a crime, and this annoyed him. Graf Lichtenberg was entirely a man of the Renaissance, as Italy, not Germany, understood it. Wolfgang, on the other hand, had his full share of that blunt honesty which made it impossible to slide from sin to virtue and back again, unconscious of any dividing line, in the graceful easy way which made life so pleasant among Italians. It might not restrain him, but he was thoroughly aware what was crime and what not, and would have looked with horror on the Beglionis and Simonettis and Malatestas of Italy. Had his brothers but lived! Graf von Lichtenberg could have moulded them to his will. But only this thick-headed unmanageable lad remained, and the Graf had to do the best he could with him. Fearful at once of his plainspokenness and of his violent temper, his father left him in Burgstein, where he ruled at his will, hunting, riding, terrifying the villagers and peasants, and exacting every toll due and tithe inexorably, while game and fish and wood were preserved as they never yet had been in the memory of anyone living in the Ilzthal. A deep hatred grew up against this lad, who already ruled with such an iron hand,

and seized every opportunity to chastise and torture, but as yet no one stirred. Not a sign of open revolt yet appeared. The heaving of the storm, which had made itself felt during summer and autumn, seemed to quiet down with the coming of winter; concessions here, severities there, through Thuringia and Franconia appeared to have dispersed it. Yet Hildemund, recollecting what he had heard in the Wünschthurm and noted in his autumn journeys, could not believe the danger averted. Rather did the stillness forebode earthquake and tempest. Nothing was more surprising than the perfect secrecy observed by the thousands only waiting the signal to rise in universal rebellion; nothing could have shown more forcibly how terrible was the tyranny that could thus bind them together. It needed but a spark to fall among them to send a flame of rebellion sweeping over the whole land, burning down all in its way, and leaving a waste behind, but one on which no young, vigorous crop should grow.

Kaspar had disappeared after his father's death. Little inquiry was made for him; he had held much aloof from the villagers, and being useless from the loss of his hand, the bailiff of Burgstein troubled himself little about him. About the same time a rumour reached the Ilzthal that a hermitage, long

deserted, close to the ill-famed Wunschthurm, had a new occupant, believed to be a holy pilgrim, who lived on the sparsest of fare—roots, black bread, water from a stream. He seldom or never was seen abroad by day, and no one had had a sight of the face hidden under his hanging cowl. The foresters reported that he spent the night in prayer and vigil under the trees. Many strangers came to visit him, and the impression grew that he was a well-known, holy man. The foresters often met him, for they had an active time of it that autumn, and were at their wits' end to discover who the marauders were who killed deer on the Burgstein and Geyer lands. In spite of the extreme severity of the game laws, poaching was never entirely checked, and at this time it became extraordinarily persistent. Yet they never laid their hand on the culprit. Hildemund thought a good deal over this too, and made more than one essay, before snow raised an impassable barrier between the Ilzthal and the lonely, distant Wunschthurm, to get a good look at the hermit, but without success.

Snow fell early and thickly, and blocked all the ways, until a hard frost made communication by means of sledges possible. Hildemund had made one, in the management of which he was skilful, and enchanted Dornröschen by taking her with him

whenever he dared. She had grown used to her surroundings, and never spoke of Burgstein, calling Magdalene "Muhme," and treating her with pretty, confiding affection, while Hildemund was something between an elder brother and a devoted knight and champion. She behaved in all ways as one of the little family, and yet underlying it all was a silent but never-dying consciousness that she was Rosilde von Burgstein, the daughter of a noble race.

To Hildemund the winter brought suspension of his journeys, and work at home; wood to split, tools to mend, and, when the way became passable, constant visits to Pfarrer Basil, who could not reconcile himself to the kind of life which Magdalene, quite against her usual good judgment, he thought, allowed her son to lead. Hildemund's education had passed beyond her range, and he joyfully accepted the priest's offer to continue it. He and Pfarrer Basil were excellent friends. He passed on a little learning to Dornröschen, who was a better pupil with him than with Frau Dahn, whom she still obeyed a little under protest, while, though wayward enough with Hildemund, and often peremptorily refusing to do what he wished, she was sure to do it when he had ceased to urge it.

Magdalene foresaw possible trouble in the future;

one day it might be needful to send Hildemund away, if Dornröschen grew up under her roof, for this close friendship, devoted and reverent on the one part, playful but very real on the other, could not long continue without danger, even though Hildemund had Paumgärten blood in his veins, and Rosilde was but a landless fugitive. Magdalene would sigh in spite of herself, as she looked at her one son, and thought of parting with him. To her he was his father over again, and thus doubly dear. To other eyes he was exceedingly like herself, only that the sweetness round his lips was ever ready to break into a gay and arch smile. Others, less partial than a mother, found pleasure in looking at the face, with its expression at once sweet and brave, full of intelligence, the brow fair and broad like hers, but the chin squarer, and the hair a lighter brown and curling at the tips. He had her absolute sincerity, her rare high-mindedness, while from his father he had taken a touch of romance, a disposition to worship and idealise where he loved. Kilian Dahn had found a wife worthy of his devotion, but even had it been otherwise he would still have idealised her. It was ingrain in the man. Hildemund paid a tender homage to his mother which often recalled that of her husband, and was very sweet to her; he thought there never had been

a woman like her, no saint nobler or purer—but his lady and queen as long as he could remember had been Rosilde. In his visits to the castle when she was but a baby it had been his delight to please and amuse her, and how much more now, when she was his guest, his charge, a fugitive and discrowned. The age of chivalry was passing; the fashion of tourney and knightly vow was gone, but the feelings which prompted them could not die, and no knight, no troubadour ever was more devoted to his liege lady than was Hildemund to Dornröschen. His mother saw and sighed, but here again her strength was for the present to sit still.

Winter, which brought so many things to a pause, cut off Herr Basil's visits to the Eschthal. He had gone often. Ulfric seemed to lay a soothing hand on his heart. In the nameless outcast he felt he had one who understood him, who felt with and for him, and was burdened with a great and heavy cross. With Magdalene he often had a curious sense of opposition, and there was the barrier between priest and woman. "Be not a friend of any one woman," A Kempis had said, though he wrote to men under vows, and spoke of good women, and Pfarrer Basil knew the wisdom of the counsel.

It was a strange friendship which sprang up be-

tween him and Ulfric. He never wholly lost the sense of harrowed repulsion which the leper inspired in him, and yet an irresistible attraction drew him to the Eschthal. It was a dreary time to him when the deep snow cut him off from Ulfric, and confined him among his villagers, who, as they had done from the first, treated him with much respect, looked at him askance, and shut their hearts against him. They flocked to hear him preach, interpreting his teaching in ways he little dreamed of; but he was as much a stranger and an outsider among them as the first day he came.

As he sat alone in his silent chamber, and felt that "a solitary life is in arduous life," his heart would die within him, and the forced inaction cruelly tried him. He sought to fill up his time in a hundred ways, but he always ended by turning to the books which Magdalene lent him, especially to that marvellous "*Theologia Germanica*," handed down from an age when souls were crying in the tumult of confusion and despair, "Who shall show us any good?" When the world was all anarchy, the Church all corruption, and religion and order seemed phantoms, it was much to know that in such a century as the fourteenth this book could be written. Although the perplexities and trials of a present age must ever seem the hardest yet known

to those who live in it, Pfarrer Basil could scarce think his own, with all its crucial questions, upheaving of anchors and snapping of cables, more hopeless than that in which had lived the unknown writer of this little book, who sought and found his God, when the lives of popes and prelates, laymen and clerics alike, testified that they believed in none.

Into its magic circle of calm Pfarrer Basil could sometimes enter and find peace.

To Ulfric also the cessation of intercourse between, not only himself and Herr Basil, but for long spaces between himself and Hildemund, was a vast loss. If Basil made him feel with wondering joy that even yet there were some to whom he could bring help and a little comfort, Hildemund was his link with the busy world of active men. Through him he sent forth his music to travel far and wide, and bear delight with it, and wake the constant question whence it came—a question as vainly asked as if some one would know where some lark, lost in blue air, is pouring his wealth of song. Through him too he learned what was said and done, and if any one besides themselves in Germany guessed the purposes of the Bundschuh it was Ulfric, who knew what a poison suffering can be when felt as injustice, and who, looking on

impartially, understood what they needed and wanted. Often he and Hildemund had talked the matter over, and it was Ulfric who had conceived those twelve articles which had passed through Hildemund to Kaspar, and from him to the whole association; though when Ulfric had devised them, he no more foresaw what the result would be than he could have told from the seed leaves of an oak that it would grow into a forest tree.

Winter was a terrible time in his cave. If in the village the weakly and the sick died, as they often did, of cold and privation, they had at least a roof to cover them, and neighbours to pity them; while the leper of the Eschthal inhabited a cavern which no store of wood, however bountiful, could warm, and the solitude was unbroken, day or night.

He was not without consolation, however. As Herr Basil had guessed, he had means to procure whatever he needed. Hildemund sought for him anything that he desired—parchment on which to illuminate and write down his music, warm clothing, firing, books, and food. He knew that he was far better off than hundreds of his sad brotherhood, living in wretched huts on scornful charity, or herded in lazar houses at Hamburg or other seaports, though there they were often tended by the Knights of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, a saint whom

the middle ages had invented as the patron of lepers.

There were times when he could feel thankful for these things, though there were others when life was so appalling a burden that he scarce could endure it, and such paroxysms of despair surged over him as left him exhausted almost to death. Yet death never came, and he was a young man, and might live many years, and perhaps become more and more a prey to foul disease each year he lived, as he knew well.

CHAPTER XIV.

HEAVY rain swept away the winter snow, and made road and path for a while even more impassable than winter had done. Spring came at length, the more welcome for having been long delayed; young leaves unfolded in the warm sunshine and clothed the network of bare branches which had so long wearied the eye, except where stood the sombre pines, whose winter was their summer. A throb of young life came into the earth, and a different throb into the hearts of thousands, who were silently waiting the moment for sending in that list of grievances which they had prepared to lay before the Emperor, demanding that they should be investigated by his brother Ferdinand, Luther, and Melanchthon. Strange trio, and strange proof of the piteous simplicity and good faith of the German peasantry! Although many undoubtedly, like Kaspar, secretly hoped to seize the moment for a bitter humbling of their lords, and took for their device, "No lords, no priests, no castles," the majority wanted nothing beyond redress of pressing wrongs. Soon, indeed,

when met with fierce opposition, their demands grew, and the lust of revenge awoke; but the first steps showed a spirit which might have been conciliated and directed.

- Nowhere were the feudal tenants so ill off as in Germany. Even those who were little farmers, far better off in material comforts than many a free peasant, were so crushed by the exactions of their lords as to be hardly more than slaves. "Pope and kings," as Erasmus wrote, and he might well have added, "lords and priests," counted the "common men not as men, but as cattle in the market." There had been attempts to attain freedom. For half a century the vassals of the Abbots of Kempten had struggled with their lords, uplifting for the first time the banner of the Bundschuh. Another and another revolt followed, always under the same sign, and always to be crushed by sword and axe, torture and halter. One main purpose of the Swabian League had been to put down every such attempt on the part of "the common man."

There were not wanting signs and tokens that might have given the alarm in 1525. A placard had been put up on the very door of the Rathhaus at Worms, signed with the forbidden name of the Bundschuh. Crazy enthusiasts went about, openly teaching the wildest doctrines. Jost Fritz, an old

enthusiast and a soldier, had for years been re-organising the Bundschuh in Swabia; Karlstadt stirred up Franconia and the Rhineland; Münzer laid the train in Thuringia. Yet no alarm was taken.

Although Kaspar told him nothing of his secret plans, Hildemund could not but share strongly in the hopes and views of the peasants. Ever since he had seen and heard what took place at the Wünschthurm, he had longed to be further initiated into the secrets of the confederates, and only his mother's urgent dissuasion had held him back. All his heart was with them, and he privately resolved that when the time came, and they made an open move, he should not be slack to join them. But spring arrived, and no sign of a rising. Farm work began again, and he had much to do in the garden and the two or three fields belonging to the house. His scythe proved out of order, and he found he must go to the village to have it set at the forge. Dornröschen was eager to accompany him, but Magdalene hesitated.

"What can you be thinking of, my son? Think if any knew her face!"

Impunity had made Hildemund bold; moreover, he never could resist Dornröschen's pleadings.

"Sweet mother, I will not take her there. She

can await me in the hazel copse, and pick prim-roses and key flowers. She will keep out of sight."

"Yes, yes, and I do so want to go! It is so long since I went out of sight of the house, and it is my name day," cried Rosilde. "I am ten years old to-day."

It was true, though she looked nearly two years younger. Magdalene yielded the more readily that she knew several patients would take advantage of this sunny day to come and consult her, and she wanted leisure to compose several remedies, such as sweet basil, with vinegar and oil of roses, and a dash of barley-meal to cure the bite of vipers, which would soon abound, now that the sun grew hot; syrup of horehound and decoction of marigolds. Magdalene looked on the preparation of her remedies as a grave matter, not to be lightly approached; she held the healing art in reverence, as type of a work higher and spiritual, and never attended to a sick person without a prayer that soul as well as body might be benefited. Far from holding the ascetic's view of the body, she regarded it as a thing to be honoured and kept fair and pure, as at once a trust and a temple. To do battle with disease was an ardent joy to her. Her vocation for tending the sick combined—with her pity for the wretched, un-

cared-for state of the old and infirm—to make her content, and more than content, to lead the life which she had chosen, though her Nüremberg kindred had sought to recall her on her widowhood, and had been almost as ill-pleased by her remaining in this humble station as by the marriage to Kilian Dahn, which had deeply humiliated them.

She began her work as soon as Hildemund had left her, with Dornröschen dancing for joy by his side, and she was soon too much absorbed in it to remember the uneasiness with which she had let them go.

Rosilde was wild with delight; during the enforced imprisonment while the rain lasted she had been like a bird in a cage whose time has come to migrate. What joy to be out of doors instead of carding wool, or learning to spin and darn. She danced along while Hildemund told her the name of some young bird or flower, or of the birds chirping overhead, and made her listen to the *fink*, *fink* of the chaffinch, and the saw-like note of the titmouse, or the loud call of the wren, strangely disproportioned to the little creature which uttered it. The summer visitants were not yet come, but he could show her the last-year's nest of a monk, as he called the black-cap, low in a hawthorn bush, and tell her how, if a hand touched the eggs, it failed

not to discover the intrusion, and would break them all and leave the nest.

All these things were delightful to the child, who had rarely been beyond the walls of Burgstein until she came to Magdalene. She wanted to pay a visit to the Eschthal, and see Ulfric and his hare; Hildemund had long since heard of her visit there, both from Ulfric and herself, and he promised to take her as soon as he could find time.

So they reached the thicket, where he had planned to leave her, while he went on to the village. The thought of being in hiding amused her, and she readily promised to keep well out of sight, and not venture forth until he should return and call her. She could be trusted, he knew; yet, now that it came to the point, he wished he had not brought her. The way to Schloss Geyer passed near; some one might notice her. He hurried to the forge, resolving not to be away an instant longer than was absolutely needful. Rosilde picked the primroses, beginning to unfold their buds and open their sweet flowers among their crinkled leaves, and looked about for a bird's nest, keeping well within the coppice, and crouching low behind the thickest hazel stems, when, by-and-by, a voice and the muffled fall of horse-hoofs on the turf told that some one was passing by. The voice sounded familiar; peep-

ing through the nut tree she distinguished Wolfgang and an attendant, returning from Schloss Geyer, where its master had come for a passing visit. Her heart beat fast; she kept quite still, though a cry for Hildemund rose to her lips. They would have trotted by unsuspecting that anyone was near but for the hound which accompanied them, a beast which had often been petted and fed by the little Burgfräulein. Immediately scenting her, it dashed into the thicket, barking joyously. Wolfgang reined in. "What hast thou there, dog? Hither! hither, I say!"

The hound only replied by louder barking.

"He has found some one he knows, sir," said Wolfgang's attendant.

"Go see who it is thus lurking."

The man obeyed, and quickly espied Rosilde, with the dog leaping round her and trying to lick her hands and face.

"Nought but a child, Junker," he shouted back.

"A child! There is but one child whom Astolf would greet thus," cried Wolfgang. "Bring her here, Hans."

And when Hildemund came within sight of the thicket, it was to hear a shout of triumph and a stifled cry, and see Wolfgang von Lichtenberg

galloping furiously off with a dog leaping wildly up at his horse, and a child flung across his saddle.

The whole party were out of sight directly, though Hildemund's wild impulse was to pursue them at his utmost speed. Sheer want of breath stopped him; he stood still and took in the full bearing of what had happened.

Half-an-hour later he stood before his mother, saying, "Wolfgang has found her, and the fault is mine."

"Oh, my poor boy!" exclaimed Magdalene.

"You may well say that," he answered, and sat down without another word.

With all her sorrow for the child, Magdalene's first thought could not but be for her son. As he sat there silent, his brow knit, every line in his face hardened and deepened, she felt as if he had suddenly passed beyond her reach, and that she—his mother—who had known all his thoughts, and been companion and friend as well as parent, could do nothing to help him.

"Wilt thou not seek Herr Basil?" she asked, almost timidly.

"A priest! To what avail?"

She had nothing to reply. It had only been a woman's impulse to turn to a priest for counsel, which prompted what she felt directly was a vain

suggestion. She asked no questions, but waited with a sore heart until he should tell her more, though, indeed, she could guess nearly enough what had befallen.

"There is but one way," he said at last, suddenly looking up. "I must to Kaspar."

"My boy, what can he do?"

"Everything, unless all makes against us. Would that I knew the secret of the passage from without! But if I can once get by any means within the walls, I can open from the keep. I marked well how that was done."

"You would admit Kaspar and his band into Burgstein!"

"Aye. They will find arms and provisions there. I take it they will scarce miss such a chance."

"My boy, think what you do," urged Magdalene, shaken from all her ordinary serenity. "Would you set spark to this tinder and be the one to kindle a fire which may burn all who come near? What chance have peasants, be they ever so many, against knights and soldiers trained to war? What but another downfall can come, and days such as followed the Poor Conrad rising, and Jost Fritz and Klaus Storch? But death, and heavier burdens, and broken hearts uncounted! It were a great sin

to lend hand to armed rebellion, and no good comes out of evil."

"It is the only way," said Hildemund, stubbornly; "they will rise whether I open Burgstein to them or not."

"Mix not with the thing," she pleaded, her eyes full of tears; "this Kaspar is no man who is deeply stirred for what he deems the cause of God, as Thomas Münzer would seem to be, err he as he may. Kaspar is but a demagogue, burning to avenge his own wrongs first, and those of his brethren next, with small thought beyond. What can come of such a taking of the sword but to fall by it?"

"Would you have me leave the lamb in the eagle's eyrie and not so much as lift a finger?" was all his answer. Never had she heard such a tone from his lips before. He had indeed, as Father Basil had prophesied, grown over her head, but in a far other way than the priest had thought of.

"My son," she said in a trembling voice, "I thought not to see you enter on an enterprise on which you could not have your mother's blessing."

"Forgive me, sweet mother," he said, his face softening for a moment; "it must go sore indeed with me since I do so."

But his purpose remained unmoved, and he left

her to seek Kaspar, while she remained with a heart so sad and bruised as she had never yet carried in all her life. That high comfort which she could take in the thought of the husband she had loved and honoured, when his loss left her a lonely woman, was wanting now, and in her fears for the dangers which Hildemund was rushing upon there mingled too the keen regret for his fresh, joyous boyhood which was being swept away. End how all might, that would never return; this was but the beginning of changes. Magdalene covered her face and wept.

It was dusk before Hildemund reached the Wunschthurm: The hermitage at its foot was empty; he pushed the door open and waited a weary time, thinking over his plans, and what were probably those of the peasants. He dared not dwell on the terror and suffering of the lost child; he turned resolutely away from that thought, to consider only what to do. That the supposed hermit was Kaspar he felt secure. It was not, indeed, possible to take possession of a hermitage at will, with no credentials, but they could sometimes be come by illegally. A hermit would die and his death be concealed, and some one who had reasons for hiding himself would take his place, and go elsewhere in his name, or a convent might be de-

ceived into patronising one far from as holy as he appeared, not that the standard was by any means high. Usually no strict investigation was made. The long sleeves would hide the loss of Kaspar's hand, and he was so unusually dexterous with the one that remained that he hardly seemed to miss it. For years he had brooded over his wrongs, and those of his class, but though he saw visions and dreamed prophetic dreams as he believed, Magdalene had judged him aright when she said he was no fanatic, but a demagogue maddened by personal injuries. At length he returned, and started angrily at the sight of some one in his abode.

"What makes you here?" he asked fiercely. "None enter without leave of me."

"I would speak with you, Kaspar. Nay, I know well who you are; did you think I did not guess from the first?"

"The worse for you, boy. What fiend has brought you here and thrust you across my way?"

Kaspar's look and tone were alike dark and threatening, the more that they were tinged with regret.

"I am no spy; I know enough already. You will want arms and powder. Would you have Burgstein put into your hands?"

"What are you speaking of?" asked Kaspar, with increased suspicion.

"I will show you a secret way into it, you and as many as you choose, if you will follow me thither within two more days."

"Schloss Burgstein! I have heard there is great store of arms there. That were indeed . . . But wherefore do you this? What do you know of need of arms?"

"There is one within those walls whom I must have forth," answered Hildemund in the same brief tone as before.

"Burgstein!" muttered Kaspar again. "Burgstein, wherein dwells the young wild beast whose teeth are already so sharp and long! Whom would you have forth?"

"That makes nothing to any save myself."

"What has come to you, lad? I scarce know you."

"I scarce know myself," answered Hildemund, with a hard laugh.

"Can I trust you? You seem to know more than you should, yet you can scarce know what hangs on this."

"I know at least that it is ever darkest before the dawn," said Hildemund.

Kaspar's eyes flashed wild fire under his swart

brows; he caught him by the shoulder. "How! how! you know our password? You are one of us? Where did you learn it! Why have you held back until now?"

"I have no heart for a long story. Will you do this, aye or no?"

"Aye," said Kaspar, after a moment's hesitation. "To hold Schloss Burgstein were a blow that would be felt far and wide; we must show from the first that we are no sheep to be driven back to fold by shout and crook. But there are many to warn, and the plan must be sure and clear. The time is close at hand; we of Thuringia, if need be, can hold our own until our brethren elsewhere have risen. It will be a gallant reckoning, and tonsure and gilt spurs shall pay their debt ere long. But mind you, I will have none with us who fight for their own hand only; do not think to go home in peace when you have gained your end, until all can say the same. What! you say nought? Would you strike for yourself and not for those who have suffered until they are well-nigh ground down into brute beasts, and who ask but their share of the sun and air and earth which was meant for all! Out upon you!"

"Nay, surely I will be one of you," said Hildegund, carried away both by Kaspar's strong and gloomy enthusiasm and the passionate resolution to

save Rosilde at all costs. "Could I abide by my plough or pack while brave deeds were doing? Right is on your side."

"Aye, when men turn no ear to a brother crying for bare justice and say, 'Lie thou there, the common man was made for us to set our foot on,' there is no cure but the sword for such deafness. To-morrow night, then, come hither. Get you home now; I must forth and lose no time."

"No, there is none to lose, though I think not they will bear her elsewhere yet awhile," muttered Hildemund, returning to that fixed idea from which Kaspar's words had for a moment turned him. He rose to go, but stopped as some one entered hastily from without. "Hast heard the tidings?" he cried, and then stopped suddenly, perceiving that Kaspar was not alone.

"Speak on; he is one of us," said Kaspar, and then Hildemund perceived that the new-comer was the fellow-serf who had checked Kaspar's imprudent vehemence on the green before the church of St. Eustace.

"So! I knew not that. But hearken: our brethren by the Bodensee, on the Lüpfen lands, have risen. Last Monday was a holiday, as ye know, and they were using the day for their own work, sorely behind-hand with the rains and the time due to the Graf

What does he? Down comes an order that they all go forth and gather snail shells for the Schloss! And thereon they rose and offered him defiance, and all Swabia is up in arms!"

"My visions spake truth!" cried Kaspar, with wild exultation. "I knew that the day and the hour were at hand! Praise be to all the saints of heaven, who are surely on our side! And I, too, have somewhat to tell you: Hildemund, here, knows a secret way into Burgstein, and will lead us thither. Tell him thy plan, lad."

"There is a way through the cavern whence the Pöllatwasser rushes forth," said Hildemund, "follow straight on, and I will—so I live to do it—open you the secret door in the keep, and you may lightly seize the gates and hold the drawbridge, and deal as you will with the castle."

"But wherefore not go with us?"

"Because I know not how to open from the outward side. I count to scale the cliff and reach a certain postern, which it is not like any has sought to repair, and so in the darkness make my way to the keep, which is never guarded nor shut."

"Thy plan is not amiss, yet I would we could lay our petition before the Kaiser ere we use force. If he knew how we were treated he would surely set all straight, and banish these lawyers who bring

in their Roman rule whereof Germany of old knew nought," said his fellow-serf, little knowing that the Emperor had hardly more power in such matters than his meanest subject.

"'Tis more like he listen if there be the clash of swords behind it," said Kaspar, to whom the pacific and moderate desires of the mass of his fellows were highly unwelcome. "And we should find a great store of arms and money in Burgstein."

"It were vain to summon the Wolf cub to join us," said his companion, "but such castles and towns as show amity shall not be harmed."

"No lords, no priests, no castles for me. Amity! Cloister and castle and city are all one when the matter in hand is to oppress the serf. Strike, as the Swiss have done, and have all men equal, say I. Long live the Swiss! They sheltered those who fled from the Abbots of Kempten, and they will help us now. But have your way; there are many who think like you, Wendel; a little while will show whether priests will remit dues, and lords meet serfs as free men and equals."

"That must they do ere we lay down the sword," said Wendel, decidedly, "else we give our necks to halter and axe."

"One thing yet, Kaspar," broke in Hildemund. "Ask me not to fight against Schloss Geyer, come

what may. My father owed all to the Graf, and I may not forget it."

"Thinkst thou we can stay for such peevish fancies?" asked Kaspar, impatiently.

"Nay, nay, he is right," said Wendel, "nor is there any need to molest Graf Geyer. 'Tis a small castle and mostly empty; we have other things to do than to waste our time over it."

Wendel had great influence among a large number of the peasantry, and Kaspar was well aware of it.

"Have your will," he said. "Now to call our brothers together."

"Were it not better we met near the Pöllatwasser than here?" Hildemund asked. "At midnight, when the moon is going down, yet there is light enough for me to make my way up the cliff. If once I can reach the old oak!"

"Wendel and Klaus shall help thee so far; they can climb as near as may be, and then raise thee again on a shield," said Kaspar. Thus it was settled, and they parted.

Once and again Magdalene attempted to speak with Hildemund and shake his resolution, or at least to persuade him to consult Ulfric, but he put her urgency aside, gently but determinedly.

"I could not draw back now if I would, mother dear," he said, "I am pledged."

Sick at heart, she asked herself if she should forbid his stirring in the matter by that mother's authority which she never yet had had occasion to invoke; but she felt she should do so now in vain. She could not hold him back from this rash enterprise, could not prevent his taking part in what she foresaw would be no peaceful, if threatening, march of a great multitude, content to disperse if their grievances were redressed. It would be a war of pillage and slaughter. The demands of the peasants would be met with scorn, or at best evaded; blood would flow, and when once the Bauer had tasted blood, what a savage revenge would he not take! She was astonished at her own blindness in not having foreseen long before what was at hand, and that Hildemund, so warmly interested in the cause of the peasantry, must inevitably be carried away.

"I have lost my son!" she said to herself, through the wakeful hours of that night. "Alas! had his father but lived to guide him! Pfarrer Basil spake truth: he has grown over my head!"

And then she betook herself to prayer, like many another mother, who can do that and nothing else for her best beloved.

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